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Disabilities-Task Force Recommendation

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Youth-to-Work Initiative

Many youth with disabilities are unable to obtain the services needed to access mainstream employment and training services and go from school to welfare instead of from school to work. The focus of this initiative will be to test alternative ways of integrating youth with disabilities into mainstream employment and training programs. The initiative will focus on breaking this transition to welfare, by providing the life skills training and support services, including income support and health services, that many youth with disabilities need to take advantage of mainstream employment and training programs. The Department of Labor, Department of Education, Social Security Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services and other members of the Task Force will collaborate in this effort.

The initiative will target several different categories of youth with disabilities, including youth in danger of dropping out of high school, youth who graduate from high school without adequate skills to move to post-secondary education or enter the work force, and youth who have the skills to move into post-secondary education. For youth in school, the emphasis will be to provide services needed to keep them in school, as well as prepare them for a transition into needed employment and training services. A key component of the initiative will be long-term follow-up to assist youth in finding and retaining employment.

Youth-to Work Initiative activities would include but are not limited to the following:

- Create a Get-to-Work Initiative focused on the 20 percent of young people with disabilities who are still on Social Security six months after completing college.
- Develop a comprehensive initiative focused on young people on SSI/SSDI to: a) expand Federal Independent Living Program, b)) offer time-limited economic support, c) provide health insurance, and d)) create transitional living program..
- Expand the use of existing federal government internship opportunities for young people with disabilities, such as the Workforce Recruitment Program for People with Disabilities and the High School-High Tech Program.
- Expand participation of young people with disabilities in existing federal internship programs such as the Presidential Management Internship Program, White House and other agency fellowships and internships, and the high school summer intern jobs program.
- Initiate a public-private sector partnership to create internship opportunities with the top 15 high technology industry leaders.
- Develop an initiative to stimulate higher participation rates of young adults with disabilities in postsecondary education.

- Coordinate and expand a federal interagency National Youth with disabilities Leadership Development Program funding priority.
- Include a Target goal for Healthy People 2010 dealing with young people with disabilities and transition.
- Coordinate interagency research agenda, such as longitudinal studies.
- Create a federal government work-based learning opportunity program for high school and college students with disabilities during the academic year.
- Develop a National Youth Mentoring Program in partnership with state and local government and private sector employers.
- Create an grants/budget initiative to increase the delivery of assistive technology, including state of the are computer equipment, to transition age students.
- Develop technical assistance, training, and outreach campaign that assures youth with disabilities are properly served and participating in the DOL's new youth programs.
- Develop training materials and programs to be used by schools and community based organizations to educate young people with disabilities to increase their knowledge of accommodations and how to access them. Have accommodations follow individual from school, postsecondary education and into work.

TASK FORCE DIRECTIVES

The Task Force recommends that:

The President convenes a White House Conference on Employment of Adults with Disabilities to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the ADA that will include representatives from the Administration, Congress, elected officials from state and local governments, Fortune 500 companies, the National Federation of Small Businesses, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the disability community and other related entities regarding employment of people with disabilities.

Justification

This Conference will provide visibility to the issue of employing persons with disabilities and build partnerships between public and private sectors.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of Labor to develop the proposals needed to create the Office of Disability Policy, Evaluation and Technical Assistance (ODPET), including the consolidation of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD). The new Office will assist the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities in implementing a coordinated and aggressive national employment strategy for persons with disabilities.

Justification

ODPET will provide a needed complement to the Presidential Task Force in ensuring the effective implementation of the coordinated effort necessary to eliminate barriers to employment, and to significantly expand employment of people with disabilities to a rate comparable to that of individuals without disabilities. The Presidential Task Force will continue to be responsible in the short-term for developing, refining and monitoring the implementation of an aggressive, national employment strategy for persons with disabilities. The new ODPET office will provide a long-term, permanent force to continue the work needed to ensure that persons with disabilities are integrated with the mainstream employment and training programs within the Labor Department. Without such a force, many initial barriers to employment for persons with disabilities are unlikely to be removed, the patterns and practices of the past are likely to re-emerge, and people with disabilities will continue to be relegated to lives of poverty and dependency on public benefits.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities to coordinate a *Youth to Work Initiative* with the Department of Labor, Department of Education, Social Security Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services and other members of the Task Force for inclusion in the President's FY 2001 budget.

Justification

Each year, nearly 40,000 eighteen-year-olds become eligible for SSI cash assistance. On average, these young adults will remain on SSI for 27 years. Youth with disabilities spend a significant portion of their time in poverty, dependent upon public assistance programs and relegated to the margins of society. Compared to students without disabilities, students with disabilities drop out of school much more frequently and enrollment in post-secondary education is less frequent.

Barriers to employment for youth with disabilities include the following: low educational attainment, low educational and employment expectations, confusing governmental programs with conflicting eligibility criteria and goals, as well as the low expectations of society and, in many instances their parents; many of whom are poorly educated and face their own barriers to work. In effect, many youth with disabilities transition from youth welfare to adult welfare with no real chance of accessing education and training opportunities needed to make a transition to work.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Task Force members' departments and agencies to collaborate and implement a multimedia, inter-agency Public Awareness Campaign focusing on the benefits of employing people with disabilities, and eliminating the negative and erroneous stereotypes that exist.

Justification

The need for immediate leadership to attack the continued existence of these pervasive, negative attitudes and prejudices is great. President Clinton, the Task Force calls on you, the Vice-President, and leaders within the Administration to launch a massive public awareness campaign, in partnership with the disability community, businesses, and other influential entities. This campaign should address the need for attitudinal changes in order to eliminate erroneous and prejudicial thinking about disability that limits opportunities--stigmas that permeate all parts of American society.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs SSA and DOL to create an "Access America for People with Disabilities" web site targeting individuals with disabilities.

Justification

In February, Vice President Gore announced "Access America for Seniors," an Internet site providing a wide range of services to older Americans -- an example of his vision of one-stop Internet access to government services. A new web site, "Access America for People with Disabilities," will likewise provide information and services offered by virtually every major Federal government agency, civilian and the military by linking to an abundance of helpful federal agency sites, information, programs and services: WIA, IDEA, SSA, DOL programs, SAMSHA, the new EEOC information for small businesses and so on.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs all Federal Agencies to promote telecommuting from home for all types of work for people with disabilities.

Justification

Research has shown that the percentage of individuals with significant disabilities who are employed is among the lowest among disadvantaged groups in the nation. In terms of the Federal workforce, these individuals are employed at a lower rate than in the private sector. It is critical that we seek out as many strategies as possible to change this picture.

Cutting edge telecommunications technology has recently made it possible for Customer Service Centers to send voice and data to home-based customer service representatives who work just as if they were in a call center. The Federal Government expends significant resources in Customer Service Call Center activities. The purpose of this directive is to bring this cutting-edge technology into the Federal government and to increase the employment rate of individuals with disabilities as much as possible.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Presidential Task Force, to strengthen Federal contractor affirmative action requirements under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In order to achieve this objective, the Department of Labor shall take the steps necessary to require that Federal contractors set goals and timetables for the employment of persons with disabilities, as they currently are required to do for the employment of women and minorities. The Department, in conjunction with its relevant Federal partners, will: (1) assess the feasibility of using the 1990 and 2000 Census files to derive the local workforce availability data needed by Federal contractors to set employment goals for persons with disabilities; (2) take the steps needed to ensure that data on persons with disabilities are included in the 2000 Census EEO Detailed file; (3) initiate a dialogue with relevant employer groups to identify and develop solutions to issues associated with setting goals for Federal contractors with respect to employing adults with disabilities; and (4) take other steps necessary to strengthen OFCCP enforcement of Section 503, including the distribution of technical assistance guidance to Federal contractors by adapting the "Accessing Opportunities -- The Plan for Increasing Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Federal Government" to meet the needs of private employers.

Justification

Federal contractors employ approximately 26 million or nearly 22% of the total civilian workforce. Based on a general analysis of employment data, the employment rate of people with disabilities in the Federal contractor sector (civilian work force) remains well below the employment rate of the general population. Under Section 503, Federal contractor affirmative action requires companies doing business with the Federal government to take pro-active measures that go beyond nondiscrimination requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

More information on Section 503 compliance and effective practices is needed to inform Federal contractors about effective practices and to revise current technical assistance guides and training materials used to maintain compliance with Section 503. An immediate review of Federal contractor affirmative action legal obligations and current Federal contractor compliance evaluation and complaint investigative procedures will result in innovative investigative procedures related to Section 503 (such as desk audits, on-site focused reviews, and measures to identify disability discrimination.)

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs DOL, HUD and SBA to bring all of their one-stop centers in compliance with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Justification

The one-stop career center systems being established under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provide an opportunity for adults with disabilities to fully participate in America's workforce. Further, one-stop centers for HUD and SBA services offer a valuable opportunity for persons with disabilities with to obtain livable housing and obtain assistance in starting their own businesses. In order for people with disabilities to benefit from these various services, all of the various one-stop systems must be fully accessible and in compliance with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs HUD to take the steps needed to establish an earned income disregard for tenants with disabilities living in other-than-PHA housing who return to work and a provision which exempts any disability related expenses incurred when a tenant goes to work from the countable income used to determine rents.

Justification

HUD has promulgated rules and crafted legislation aimed at providing incentives for low-income individuals in public housing to work or work more. Current rules however, do not provide incentives for employment of people with disabilities who do not live in PHA housing. People with disabilities without any recent work history should not find that they are at risk for losing their housing or that they are immediately faced with an increased expenditure necessary to retain decent and affordable housing as a consequence of returning to the workforce.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs OMB to develop a proposal to provide additional funding to support new and expanded state loan programs to make assistive technology more affordable for Americans with disabilities.

Justification

Improving access to assistive technology is critical to the employment of adults with disabilities. This initiative builds upon the President's commitment made in 1999 that provided 35 million dollars to increase employment of adults with disabilities to become competitive in the today's high- tech job market.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of the Treasury to develop a proposal for a tax credit to encourage voluntary new construction or renovations to housing properties that would allow homeowners to host visitors with disabilities in their homes.

Justification

The current IRS code provides little incentive for homeowners to make their housing accessible to visitors with disabilities. It allows a tax deduction for some renovations only if needed for the homeowner or a dependent with a disability who has shown medical necessity, based on a restrictive medical model. This existing tax incentive needs to be expanded to accommodate the general economic and social needs of the disability community.

The concept of “visitability” involves voluntarily making private homes accessible enough so that individuals with disabilities and their families can visit with the occupants of another home independently for meetings, social gatherings, etc. People who are aging or living with a disability face problems of inaccessibility on a daily basis that results in segregation and isolation. Further, many people with disabilities, or who are aging, often have low incomes, and may not have the means to move to an accessible residence. Instead they remain in inaccessible homes that are unsafe, restrictive and isolating.

More importantly, the economic price of segregation and isolation caused by inaccessible housing is enormous. The alternative to “aging in place”, for example, quite often is a nursing home. In addition, one primary means by which people with disabilities gain employment is through word of mouth and social contact.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Social Security Administration to develop and implement the regulations needed to raise the Earned Income Exclusion for SSI recipients, both adults and students, in order to increase work incentives and encourage work effort.

Justification

SSI is a means tested program, but beneficiaries are able to have nominal earnings before experiencing any reduction in benefit amounts. Allowing such earnings not only increases overall income security, but also provides an incentive to work. The earned income exclusions for both adults and students, however, have not been raised since the early 1970's, even though the SSI Federal benefit rate is indexed annually for inflation. The Earned Income Exclusion remains at \$65 per month for adults set in 1972 and at

\$133 per month for students set in 1974. As a result, SSI beneficiaries with non-SSI income do not receive full indexing of their benefits, and work effort is less rewarded than it was previously .

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of Health and Human Services to develop the legislative proposal needed to require that the Maternal and Child Health Programs for Children with Special Needs provide services to youth with disabilities who are under the age of 16.

Justification

The Maternal and Child Health Programs for Children with Special Needs (Title V of the Social Security Act) provides services to youth with disabilities that are essential to preparing them for continued education and training, but are restricted to serving only youth 16 years and older. As a result, many youth with disabilities are ready to drop out of the education stream just at a time when they become eligible to receive services that would enable them to benefit from continued education. There is a clear need to provide these services to youth with disabilities at an earlier age.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of Defense to take the necessary steps to develop greater outreach and increased employment of persons with disabilities in appropriate support positions in the various Armed Forces.

Justification

The Armed Forces generally reject persons with disabilities as being unsuitable for military duty, despite the obvious capacity of many persons with disabilities to perform capably in various types of support jobs. At the same time, the various Armed Forces encountering difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of youth to enlist in the military. The solution to this disconnect is to get the Armed Forces to reach out and utilize the skills of persons with disabilities in appropriate positions.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to take the necessary steps to develop greater outreach and increased employment of persons with disabilities in the Public Health Service.

Justification

The Public Health Service, like the Armed Services, rejects many persons with

disabilities, as unsuitable for duty, particularly those with mental disabilities. Many persons with disabilities clearly have the skills needed to perform jobs in the Public Health Services. Like the Armed Forces, the Public Health Service should be taking steps to recruit and employ persons with disabilities who have the skills to perform jobs in the Service.

Relationship of ODPET to Presidential Task Force

Background

- The initial proposal for the new ODPET office assumed that the Executive Order would be allowed to expire and that the office would totally subsume the mission, goals and responsibilities of the Task Force.
- Staff discussions raised the possibility that it would be difficult to achieve the primary goal of the Task Force -- the coordination of Federal policy across a number of different agencies -- if these functions and responsibilities are totally transferred to or subsumed by a permanent component of the Department of Labor.

A Revised Proposal

- The concerns raised about the difficulties of coordinating Federal policy through a permanent office, such as ODPET, undoubtedly are valid.
- To address these concerns, we now propose to retain the Task Force structure as an entity that is distinct and separate from ODPET.
- First, the Executive Order would be amended to extend the life of the Task Force for another 5 years, to 2007. It is important to retain the temporary nature of the Task Force, in order to continue giving the Task Force activities a sense of urgency.
- Second, the Secretary of Labor would be retained as Chair of the Task Force, but the Vice Chair of the Task Force would be changed from the Chair of the President's Committee to the Chair of the National Disability Business Development Board within the ODPET office, in order to retain a significant external influence on Task Force activities well as provide some linkages to ODPET.
- Third, the Task Force would continue to have a separate stream of funding, dedicated staff, including detailees from other Federal agencies, its own distinct physical location, and an Executive Director devoted solely to Task Force activities.
- Fourth, ODPET would have staff dedicated to working on Task Force activities, and would serve as a complement to the Task Force staff.
- The resulting separate structures for ODPET and the Task Force would ensure a continued high level of visibility within the Administration for Task Force activities, while the ODPET staffing structure would ensure that Task Force activities are coordinated and integrated with ongoing functions and activities within the Department of Labor.

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Justification

ODPET will provide a needed complement to the Presidential Task Force in ensuring the effective implementation of the coordinated effort necessary to eliminate barriers to employment, and to significantly expand employment of people with disabilities to a rate comparable to that of individuals without disabilities. The Presidential Task Force will continue to be responsible in the short-term for developing, refining and monitoring the implementation of an aggressive, national employment strategy for persons with disabilities. The new ODPET office will provide a long-term, permanent force to continue the work needed to ensure that persons with disabilities are integrated with the mainstream employment and training programs within the Labor Department. Without such a force, many initial barriers to employment for persons with disabilities are unlikely to be removed, the patterns and practices of the past are likely to re-emerge, and people with disabilities will continue to be relegated to lives of poverty and dependency on public benefits.

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Barriers to employment for youth with disabilities include the following: low educational attainment, low educational and employment expectations, confusing governmental programs with conflicting eligibility criteria and goals, as well as the low expectations of society and, in many instances their parents; many of whom are poorly educated and face their own barriers to work. In effect, many youth with disabilities transition from youth welfare to adult welfare with no real chance of accessing education and training opportunities needed to make a transition to work.

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The need for immediate leadership to attack the continued existence of these pervasive, negative attitudes and prejudices is great. President Clinton, the Task Force calls on you, the Vice-President, and leaders within the Administration to launch a massive public awareness campaign, in partnership with the disability community, businesses, and other influential entities. This campaign should address the need for attitudinal changes in order to eliminate erroneous and prejudicial thinking about disability that limits opportunities--stigmas that permeate all parts of American society.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs SSA and DOL to create an "Access America for People with Disabilities" web site targeting individuals with disabilities.

Justification

In February, Vice President Gore announced "Access America for Seniors," an Internet site providing a wide range of services to older Americans -- an example of his vision of one-stop Internet access to government services. A new web site, "Access America for People with Disabilities," will likewise provide information and services offered by virtually every major Federal government agency, civilian and the military by linking to an abundance of helpful federal agency sites, information, programs and services: WIA, IDEA, SSA, DOL programs, SAMSHA, the new EEOC information for small businesses and so on.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs all Federal Agencies to promote telecommuting from home for all types of work for people with disabilities.

Justification

Research has shown that the percentage of individuals with significant disabilities who are employed is among the lowest among disadvantaged groups in the nation. In terms of the Federal workforce, these individuals are employed at a lower rate than in the private sector. It is critical that we seek out as many strategies as possible to change this picture.

Cutting edge telecommunications technology has recently made it possible for Customer Service Centers to send voice and data to home-based customer service representatives who work just as if they were in a call center. The Federal Government expends significant resources in Customer Service Call Center activities. The purpose of this directive is to bring this cutting-edge technology into the Federal government and to increase the employment rate of individuals with disabilities as much as possible.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Presidential Task Force, to strengthen Federal contractor affirmative action requirements under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In order to achieve this objective, the Department of Labor shall take the steps necessary to require that Federal contractors set goals and timetables for the employment of persons with disabilities, as they currently are required to do for the employment of women and minorities. The Department, in conjunction with its relevant Federal partners, will: (1) assess the feasibility of using the 1990 and 2000 Census files to derive the local workforce availability data needed by Federal contractors to set employment goals for persons with disabilities; (2) take the steps needed to ensure that data on persons with disabilities are included in the 2000 Census EEO Detailed file; (3) initiate a dialogue with relevant employer groups to identify and develop solutions to issues associated with setting goals for Federal contractors with respect to employing adults with disabilities; and (4) take other steps necessary to strengthen OFCCP enforcement of Section 503, including the distribution of technical assistance guidance to Federal contractors by adapting the "Accessing Opportunities -- The Plan for Increasing Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Federal Government" to meet the needs of private employers.

Justification

Federal contractors employ approximately 26 million or nearly 22% of the total civilian workforce. Based on a general analysis of employment data, the employment rate of people with disabilities in the Federal contractor sector (civilian work force) remains well below the employment rate of the general population. Under Section 503, Federal contractor affirmative action requires companies doing business with the Federal government to take pro-active measures that go beyond nondiscrimination requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

More information on Section 503 compliance and effective practices is needed to inform Federal contractors about effective practices and to revise current technical assistance guides and training materials used to maintain compliance with Section 503. An immediate review of Federal contractor affirmative action legal obligations and current Federal contractor compliance evaluation and complaint investigative procedures will result in innovative investigative procedures related to Section 503 (such as desk audits, on-site focused reviews, and measures to identify disability discrimination.)

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs DOL, HUD and SBA to bring all of their one-stop centers in compliance with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Justification

The one-stop career center systems being established under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provide an opportunity for adults with disabilities to fully participate in America's workforce. Further, one-stop centers for HUD and SBA services offer a valuable opportunity for persons with disabilities with to obtain livable housing and obtain assistance in starting their own businesses. In order for people with disabilities to benefit from these various services, all of the various one-stop systems must be fully accessible and in compliance with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs HUD to take the steps needed to establish an earned income disregard for tenants with disabilities living in other-than-PHA housing who return to work and a provision which exempts any disability related expenses incurred when a tenant goes to work from the countable income used to determine rents.

Justification

HUD has promulgated rules and crafted legislation aimed at providing incentives for low-income individuals in public housing to work or work more. Current rules however, do not provide incentives for employment of people with disabilities who do not live in PHA housing. People with disabilities without any recent work history should not find that they are at risk for losing their housing or that they are immediately faced with an increased expenditure necessary to retain decent and affordable housing as a consequence of returning to the workforce.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs OMB to develop a proposal to provide additional funding to support new and expanded state loan programs to make assistive technology more affordable for Americans with disabilities.

Justification

Improving access to assistive technology is critical to the employment of adults with disabilities. This initiative builds upon the President's commitment made in 1999 that

provided 35 million dollars to increase employment of adults with disabilities to become competitive in the today's high- tech job market.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of the Treasury to develop a proposal for a tax credit to encourage voluntary new construction or renovations to housing properties that would allow homeowners to host visitors with disabilities in their homes.

Justification

The current IRS code provides little incentive for homeowners to make their housing accessible to visitors with disabilities. It allows a tax deduction for some renovations only if needed for the homeowner or a dependent with a disability who has shown medical necessity, based on a restrictive medical model. This existing tax incentive needs to be expanded to accommodate the general economic and social needs of the disability community.

The concept of "visitability" involves voluntarily making private homes accessible enough so that individuals with disabilities and their families can visit with the occupants of another home independently for meetings, social gatherings, etc. People who are aging or living with a disability face problems of inaccessibility on a daily basis that results in segregation and isolation. Further, many people with disabilities, or who are aging, often have low incomes, and may not have the means to move to an accessible residence. Instead they remain in inaccessible homes that are unsafe, restrictive and isolating.

More importantly, the economic price of segregation and isolation caused by inaccessible housing is enormous. The alternative to "aging in place", for example, quite often is a nursing home. In addition, one primary means by which people with disabilities gain employment is through word of mouth and social contact.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Social Security Administration to develop and implement the regulations needed to raise the Earned Income Exclusion for SSI recipients, both adults and students, in order to increase work incentives and encourage work effort.

Justification

SSI is a means tested program, but beneficiaries are able to have nominal earnings before experiencing any reduction in benefit amounts. Allowing such earnings not only increases overall income security, but also provides an incentive to work. The earned

income exclusions for both adults and students, however, have not been raised since the early 1970's, even though the SSI Federal benefit rate is indexed annually for inflation. The Earned Income Exclusion remains at \$65 per month for adults set in 1972 and at \$133 per month for students set in 1974. As a result, SSI beneficiaries with non-SSI income do not receive full indexing of their benefits, and work effort is less rewarded than it was previously .

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of Health and Human Services to develop the legislative proposal needed to require that the Maternal and Child Health Programs for Children with Special Needs provide services to youth with disabilities who are under the age of 16.

Justification

The Maternal and Child Health Programs for Children with Special Needs (Title V of the Social Security Act) provides services to youth with disabilities that are essential to preparing them for continued education and training, but are restricted to serving only youth 16 years and older. As a result, many youth with disabilities are ready to drop out of the education stream just at a time when they become eligible to receive services that would enable them to benefit from continued education. There is a clear need to provide these services to youth with disabilities at an earlier age.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Department of Defense to take the necessary steps to develop greater outreach and increased employment of persons with disabilities in appropriate support positions in the various Armed Forces.

Justification

The Armed Forces generally reject persons with disabilities as being unsuitable for military duty, despite the obvious capacity of many persons with disabilities to perform capably in various types of support jobs. At the same time, the various Armed Forces encountering difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of youth to enlist in the military. The solution to this disconnect is to get the Armed Forces to reach out and utilize the skills of persons with disabilities in appropriate positions.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to take the necessary steps to develop greater outreach and increased employment of persons with disabilities

in the Public Health Service.

Justification

The Public Health Service, like the Armed Services, rejects many persons with disabilities, as unsuitable for duty, particularly those with mental disabilities. Many persons with disabilities clearly have the skills needed to perform jobs in the Public Health Services. Like the Armed Forces, the Public Health Service should be taking steps to recruit and employ persons with disabilities who have the skills to perform jobs in the Service.

The Plan *for* Employment of People With Disabilities in the Federal Government

Accessing Opportunity

United States Office of Personnel Management	Employment Service	Theodore Roosevelt Building 1900 E Street, NW Washington, DC 20415-9800	202-606-1059 www.opm.gov
			ES DO-04 October 1999

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Copies of this document may be obtained from OPM's website, www.opm.gov. Persons with disabilities may request copies in alternate formats, including large print, Braille, audio cassette, and computer disk by calling (202) 606-1059 (voice) or (202) 606-0023 (TTY).

- INTRODUCTION -

As the 21st century approaches, scientific and technological advances are giving rise to new industries and occupations unheard of only a decade ago. As these advances occur, new employment opportunities are becoming plentiful. However, the majority of working-age individuals with severe disabilities have not shared in this employment prosperity.

The Federal government has a statutory obligation to engage in affirmative action with respect to the hiring, placement and advancement of individuals with disabilities. In undertaking this statutory obligation, departments and agencies must consult Management Directives issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Copies of the Management Directives can be obtained by calling (202) 663-4599. The Federal government is committed to taking the lead in charting a public policy that provides clear direction to both the public and private sectors.

To this end, the President signed Executive Order 13078 on March 13, 1998, establishing the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. The Task Force's mission is to create a coordinated and aggressive national policy to bring adults with disabilities into gainful employment at a rate as close as possible to that of the general adult population. On November 15, 1998, the Task Force issued its first report, "Recharting the Course." On December 14, 1998, Vice President Gore accepted the report on behalf of the Administration, and directed the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to develop a plan to increase the representation of adults with disabilities in the Federal workforce. This Plan will help ensure that departments and agencies:

- Recruit widely for positions at all levels;
- Provide opportunities for students with disabilities;
- Give full consideration to employees with disabilities for inclusion in developmental opportunities;
- Collect and maintain data to monitor success; and
- Provide reasonable accommodations for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities, consistent with guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

OPM provides this Plan for government-wide use as part of its ongoing support of and commitment to the President's and Vice-President's goal of making the Federal government a model employer of people with disabilities. Experience has shown that government-wide programs and initiatives require the dedicated and sustained commitment of department and agency leadership. This Plan will assist Federal employers in fulfilling their commitment to become model employers of people with disabilities.

THE PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT -

Recruit widely for positions at all levels of the Federal workforce, including GS-13 to 15 and senior executive service levels.

Recruitment Strategies

- In developing targeted recruitment strategies for people with disabilities, Federal employers will recruit widely and develop collaborative efforts with community outreach groups. By working together, the use of resources would be maximized while attracting highly-qualified persons with disabilities at all levels.

OPM will develop a collection of “best practices” in the public and private sectors of successful recruitment efforts of people with disabilities. Information will be shared with Federal departments and agencies, other public entities, and interested parties.

OPM will also share information through OPM Service Center “messengers.” These messengers will serve as liaisons between the Plan and the community and Federal departments and agencies. They will also work closely with Federal Executive Boards, Federal Executive Associations, and Personnel (or Human Resources) Councils to disseminate information about planned efforts and best practices.

- Federal employers will review internal human resource policies to ensure that every flexibility is considered in areas such as alternative work schedules and job sharing. They will also disseminate employment and other information in alternate formats such as large print, audio cassette, Braille, computer disk, or accessible Internet sites.
- Federal employers should review their programs to determine if part-time employment opportunities could be created to accommodate employees with disabilities.
- Departments and agencies should explore ways to recruit from all sources when filling positions, including those in the Senior Executive Service and managerial and supervisory positions at grades GS-13 to 15, in order to attract candidates with disabilities from inside and outside the Federal government.

- Departments and agencies should use a variety of resources and networks available to them to remove barriers to employment and assist them in actively recruiting people with disabilities. These resources include but are not limited to the following:
 - The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) will help Federal employers receive expert accommodation information easily before, during, and after the recruitment process. JAN is a confidential service which allows any manager or employee to receive individualized information on his or her accommodation issue. It is run by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD), and may be reached at (800) 526-7234.
 - The Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP) is one source Federal employers may tap for potential employees. The WRP is managed by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD) and the Department of Defense. It is a resource used to connect public or private sector employers nationwide with highly-motivated post-secondary students and recent graduates with disabilities. The WRP has two long-term goals: (1) to provide college students with disabilities the opportunity to obtain summer employment which may lead to permanent employment in the Federal or private sector; and (2) to break down attitudinal barriers held by employers and co-workers by demonstrating that people with disabilities can work successfully in a variety of jobs. Employers may access the candidate database by contacting their agency's WRP representative.
 - Project ABLE (Able Beneficiaries' Link to Employers) is a national resume bank which provides any employer an easily-accessible applicant pool of qualified job-ready individuals. These individuals receive Social Security or Supplemental Security Income disability benefits and are prepared to work. Employers may request resumes--
 - By telephone: (757) 441-3362;
 - By fax: (757) 441-3374; or
 - By Email: projable@opm.gov.

Federal employers may also access Project ABLE by dialing OPM's Automated Applicant Referral System at (912) 757-3150. A valid agency identification code is needed to access the system; it may be obtained by calling (912) 744-2085. For more information on Project ABLE, please contact the Social Security Administration at (410) 965-9040, TTY (410) 966-6210, or through Internet at: www.ssa.gov/odhome/odderp/P_Able.htm.

- State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are also potential recruitment sources. They provide counseling, evaluation, training and other services to individuals with disabilities, including disabled veterans.

For more information and to locate the nearest SVRA, please access the agency's website at: www.nchrtm.okstate.edu/nchrtm_links/state_VR.html.

For more information and to locate the nearest VA facility, please access the department's website at: <http://www.va.gov/stations97/guide/home.asp?DIVISION=ALL>. Also, telephone numbers may be found in the government blue pages section of the local telephone directory.

- Department or agency-wide memoranda to increase the number of people with disabilities in the Federal workforce will be distributed within their respective agencies. Employees will also appreciate knowing what efforts are currently underway to increase the number of people with disabilities in their own departments or agencies. To support department and agency efforts, **OPM** is available to provide government-wide or agency-specific data.
- **OPM** will help educate Federal employers on various recruiting and hiring options available to employ people with disabilities. The first step is issuing *People with Disabilities in the Federal Government: An Employment Guide* as a companion piece to this plan. Copies of the guide may be obtained from OPM's website, www.opm.gov. Persons with disabilities may request copies in alternate formats by calling (202) 606-1059 (voice) or (202) 606-0023 (TTY).
- Federal employers will educate and train managers and supervisors on various hiring programs and resources available to them in recruiting, promoting, and retaining employees with disabilities. An initial survey regarding familiarity with these programs may help identify specific training needs.

Vacancy Announcements

- Federal employers will include language in vacancy announcements that states that reasonable accommodations will be made for qualified applicants or employees with disabilities, except when doing so would pose an undue hardship on the employing agency.¹ **OPM** will assist departments and agencies with developing appropriate language.

Special Appointing Authorities

¹ An undue hardship is defined as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of factors such as the agency's size, financial resources, and the nature and structure of the operation. See EEOC's Enforcement Guidance on Reasonable Accommodation, dated March 1, 1999. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) operated by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD) is an excellent technical assistance resource in the area of reasonable accommodation.

- **OPM** will continue to work with departments and agencies on the use of the special appointing authorities available to them when employing people with disabilities. These special appointing authorities include:

Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(ii) for hiring readers, interpreters, and personal assistants. This excepted authority is used to appoint readers, interpreters, and personal assistants for employees with severe disabilities. After one year of satisfactory service, they may qualify for conversion to permanent status.

Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(t) for hiring people with mental retardation. This excepted authority is used to appoint persons with cognitive disabilities (mental retardation). They may qualify for conversion to permanent status after two years of satisfactory service.

Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(u) for hiring people with severe physical disabilities. This excepted authority is used to appoint persons with severe physical disabilities who have demonstrated satisfactory performance through a temporary appointment, or have been certified as likely to succeed in performing the duties of the job. After two years of satisfactory service, they may qualify for conversion to permanent status.

Schedule B, 5 CFR 213.3202(k) for hiring people who have recovered from mental illness. This excepted authority is used to appoint persons who are certified that they are at a severe disadvantage in obtaining employment because of disrupted employment due to hospitalization or outpatient treatment for psychiatric disabilities. Certification also ensures that they are capable of functioning in the positions for which they will be appointed, and that any residual disabilities are not job-related.

Note: OPM will issue regulations implementing Executive Order, No. 13124, dated June 4, 1999, providing persons with psychiatric disabilities the same employment opportunities as persons with mental retardation or severe physical disabilities. Until the regulations are final, agencies may continue to use 5 CFR 213.3202(k) and any other appropriate excepted service appointing authorities to appoint persons with psychiatric disabilities.

5 CFR 315.604 for hiring disabled veterans enrolled in a VA training program. This authority is used to hire veterans with disabilities who are eligible for training under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) vocational rehabilitation program (38 U.S.C. chapter 31). The veterans may enroll for training or work experience at an agency under the terms of an agreement between the agency and VA. While enrolled in the VA program the veterans are not Federal employees for most purposes, but are beneficiaries of the VA. Upon successful completion, the host agency and VA give the veterans Certificates of Training showing the occupational series and grade levels of the positions for which trained. The Certificates of Training allows any agency to appoint the veterans noncompetitively under a status quo appointment which may be converted to permanent status at any time. (The

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, provides that Federal departments and agencies should initiate efforts with State vocational rehabilitation agencies to develop and enter into work experience agreements similar to those available for disabled veterans under 5 CFR 315.604.)

5 CFR 316.201(b) for hiring worker-trainees for programs such as the Welfare to Work program. In his memorandum, dated March 8, 1997, the President directed Federal agencies to expand the use of the worker-trainee authority, under TAPER (temporary appointment pending establishment of a register) and other excepted service hiring authorities to appoint welfare recipients to entry-level positions. Accordingly, Federal agencies may utilize the worker-trainee authority as a vehicle to further its Welfare to Work programs.

5 CFR 316.302(b)(5) and 5 CFR 316.402(b)(5) for hiring 30 percent or more disabled veterans. These authorities are used to hire veterans who are 30 percent or more disabled under temporary appointments of more than 60 days, or term appointments. The veterans must have retired from active military service with a 30 percent or more disability rating, or be rated by the Department of Veterans Affairs within the preceding year as having a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more. The department or agency may convert these individuals to permanent status at any time during the appointment.

- EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS -

- In addition to the other appointing authorities listed on pages 5-6 of this Plan, Federal

Provide opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in internship and student employment programs.

employers are encouraged to develop agency-specific programs to employ students with disabilities (such as programs developed by the Department of Labor and the General Services Administration).

- An outstanding program that is currently in place in the Federal government is the Student Educational Employment Program. The program has two components: Student Temporary Employment and Student Career Experience (5 CFR 213.3202(a) and (b)). Both programs offer valuable, paid work experience to all students--high school, vocational and technical, associate degree, undergraduate, and graduate. Students may be employed year-round and receive a flexible schedule of work assignments. Federal employers should tailor the Student Educational Employment Program to attract students with disabilities to Federal employment.

OPM will continue promoting the Student Educational Employment Program to students, colleges and universities, and Federal managers and supervisors to attract students with disabilities to the Federal workforce.

OPM will serve as a clearinghouse for all students interested in Student Educational Employment Program opportunities.

OPM will work with appropriate organizations to identify information on accredited schools and programs with a high concentration of students with disabilities, and provide the information to departments and agencies.

OPM will establish master cooperative education agreements with schools in order for Federal employers to tailor them for specific uses.

- Another source of potential employees with disabilities is the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program. The PMI Program is a two-year, entry-level career development and training program designed to attract to Federal service masters and doctoral students in a variety of academic disciplines. Students are nominated by their schools, and are invited to participate in an OPM-developed structured assessment process. Finalists are not guaranteed placement; they take an active role in finding a position in the Federal government. Upon successful completion of the two-year internship, PMI's are eligible for permanent status. In its

information letters to colleges and universities concerning the PMI Program, **OPM** will reinforce its commitment to diversity, including the recruitment of persons with disabilities.

OPM will also continue outreach efforts through campus visits and targeting of professional organizations and publications serving the interests of people with disabilities.

- Colleges and universities will be encouraged to identify students with disabilities who meet the criteria of the programs listed above.
- Federal employers are encouraged to use the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP) described previously (see Recruitment and Placement) as an excellent source for potential employees. Employers can access the candidate database by contacting their agency's WRP representative.

- CAREER DEVELOPMENT -

Give full consideration to employees with disabilities for inclusion in developmental opportunities designed to enhance their leadership skills and to advance their careers.

- Federal employers will ensure that persons with disabilities are made aware of, and have an equal opportunity to compete for, managerial and executive training or other career development opportunities. Self-nominations should be invited and encouraged, as well as nominations made by managers and supervisors.
- Departments and agencies will review career development and related programs to make sure that no barriers exist for people with disabilities. If targeted recruitment is used to broaden the pool of candidates for these programs, include as part of that effort employees with disabilities and organizations that represent their interests.
- Federal employers should establish formal mentoring programs, especially for participants of career development programs. Mentors serve as role models and act as personal advisors and confidants. They help build self-confidence; expand individual awareness, insight, and perspective about the organization; talk about performance expectations; and discuss developmental needs and how to obtain them.
- Departments and agencies will develop training and other courses related to disability employment issues. These courses are helpful to all levels of agency management--from first-line supervisors to the Senior Executive Service. Issues that may be covered include disability culture awareness, eliminating attitudinal barriers, communication between disability and non-disability communities, and transforming organizations to accommodate cultural differences.
- **OPM**, through the Federal Executive Institute and Management Development Centers, will conduct diversity training initiatives for senior management. This will improve understanding of the issues related to the employment of people with disabilities.

- MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS -

Collects and maintains data to monitor the success in achieving a higher percentage of adults with disabilities in the federal workforce.

- **OPM** will widely disseminate information on the Federal employment of people with disabilities, such as its *People with Disabilities in the Federal Government--A Statistical Profile* report, to all departments and agencies.
- Departments and agencies are expected to regularly monitor their own workforce data, especially elements concerning workforce composition, as set out in EEOC Management Directives. Periodic surveying of the workforce, and evaluating the resulting data, will determine progress and successes. In turn, the data may be used to develop internal recruiting strategies and workforce planning initiatives.
- In their performance management programs, Federal employers should review efforts and successes of their managers in diversity hiring. During performance reviews, efforts by the manager or supervisor to achieve diversity in his or her organization are evaluated--including efforts to hire people with disabilities. Open discussions of how to eliminate employment barriers are encouraged.
- Federal employers are encouraged to recognize managers and supervisors whose recruiting, hiring, and promoting efforts of those with disabilities are commendable.
- **OPM**, in its oversight role, and the EEOC, as the agency responsible for enforcing the Federal government's affirmative action and non-discrimination programs related to disability, will monitor Federal employer efforts in recruiting and employing people with disabilities.

- REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION -

Provide reasonable accommodations for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities, consistent with guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

- A reasonable accommodation is an adjustment or alteration that enables a qualified person with a disability to apply for a job, perform job duties, or enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment. Federal departments and agencies will make reasonable accommodations for qualified persons with disabilities unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the agency.
- The concept of reasonable accommodation applies to all aspects of employment, including recruitment, training, promotion, reassignment, and developmental assignments. Departments and agencies are expected to ensure that their personnel are familiar with Federal and agency-specific policies and procedures related to the availability of reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Departments and agencies should also consult the new enforcement guidance on reasonable accommodation issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on March 1, 1999. Copies can be obtained by calling (800) 669-3362. They can also be reviewed at EEOC's website, www.eeoc.gov.
- Reasonable accommodations vary with the needs of the individuals involved, the type of position in question, and the ingenuity of the agency. Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the applicant or employee, the specific disability and existing limitations, the essential functions of the particular job, the work environment, and the effectiveness of the proposed accommodation. The cost of a job or work environment accommodation can often be minimal. The applicant or employee should always be consulted before an accommodation is made. Please consult the appropriate section in OPM's *People with Disabilities in the Federal Government: An Employment Guide*, for additional information on types of reasonable accommodation.
- Departments and agencies should widely disseminate their reasonable accommodation policies and should integrate the topic of reasonable accommodation into existing training for management and supervisory employees, as well as for those connected with agency hiring processes.