

RespectAbility: Gov. Walker affirms continuing commitment to jobs for people with disabilities

Posted on Friday, Oct 5, 2018

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Washington D.C. – Gov. Scott Walker has declared October as Disability Employment Awareness Month in Wisconsin.

“The engagement of Wisconsin businesses is key to a workforce system that encourages the full participation of all individuals who want to work,” Walker stated.

Throughout this month, Walker’s mission is to encourage people with disabilities to accomplish their goals of employment with perseverance. Employers are invited to consider their options when they hire people with disabilities and use their creativity to come up with solutions about accommodations and jobs.

“Job seekers with disabilities offer tremendous skills, abilities, and other qualities that benefit any employer,” Walker adds.

[This proclamation](#) reflects Wisconsin’s continuing effort to empower Badger State residents with disabilities. Wisconsin consistently has outperformed bigger states

like Texas and California.

Meanwhile, President Trump issued a [statement](#) saying that his Administration “reaffirms its support for all the employers who hire Americans with disabilities, providing opportunities for success. It is important that all our Nation’s job seekers and creators are both empowered and motivated to partake in our booming economy, and apply their unique talents and skills to the growing workforce.”

He added, “We recognize the achievements of Americans with disabilities whose contributions in the workforce help ensure the strength of our Nation. We also renew our commitment to creating an environment of opportunity for all Americans and educating people about disability employment issues.”

An annual celebration, National Disability Employment Awareness Month is dedicated to raising awareness about disability employment issues and celebrating the incredible contributions of people with disabilities. In total, there are more than 344,120 working-age people with disabilities living with disabilities in Wisconsin. That includes people who are blind or deaf or have other visible conditions such as spinal cord injuries, as well as people with invisible disabilities including learning disabilities, mental health or Autism.

Of that number, 143,726 have jobs. That means that Wisconsin has a 41.8 percent disability employment rate. According to [RespectAbility](#), a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that works to fight stigmas and advance opportunities for people with disabilities, Wisconsin ranks 14th compared to the rest of the country.

“Our nation was founded on the principle that anyone who works hard should be able to get ahead in life,” said Steve Bartlett, the chair of RespectAbility. Bartlett, a former U.S. Congressman, the former Mayor of Dallas and a principal co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act added, “People with disabilities deserve equal opportunity to earn an income and achieve independence just like anyone else.”

The state of Wisconsin offers a range of innovative programs to support and empower people with disabilities into the workforce. One key example of this has been the [Wisconsin PROMISE](#) program that offers youth with disabilities job, benefits and financial counseling. The 2,000 individuals participating in the program hold twice as many jobs that last longer and have more hours than those individuals served by rehabilitation services not participating in the program.

Beyond PROMISE, [Project SEARCH](#) is another major component of Wisconsin's commitment to workforce development solutions for youth with disabilities. Project SEARCH is a program that empowers young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to successfully transition from the classroom into the workforce. Without this type of support, young people with disabilities face incredible challenges entering the workforce and earning an income.

In 2013, Wisconsin was home to only three such programs, serving only around 36 youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities each school year. In 2015, Project SEARCH in Wisconsin added 14 new sites, now serving approximately 140 youth each year. Because of the Blueprint for Prosperity Initiative, launched by Gov. Walker in 2014, Wisconsin soon will host a total of 27 sites, serving more than 300 youth with disabilities annually.

This year's proclamation joins Gov. Walker's long list of efforts around jobs for people with disabilities. In his 2014 State of the State Address, he put jobs for people with disabilities front and center of his agenda by proclaiming the [Year of A Better Bottom Line](#). Earlier this year, in his State of the State Address, he highlighted the fact that "[success rate](#) for Project SEARCH in Wisconsin is 88 percent, which makes it one of the best in the country."

When people with disabilities are given access to the workforce, both the individual and the employers benefit. People with disabilities can bring new talents and ways of thinking to the table. Companies such as JP Morgan Chase, Coca-Cola, [UPS](#), [IBM](#), [Starbucks](#) and [Walgreens](#) practice inclusive hiring and have had great success.

"People with disabilities bring unique characteristics and talents to Wisconsin's economy," adds Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, President of RespectAbility. "People with disabilities can work in hospitals and hotels, or apply their talents to develop computer software and website design. There are no limits to what they can do."

For more information about state rankings and employment resources, you can visit www.RespectAbility.org.