

U.S. Rep. Grothman: Unique Abilities Shouldn't Hold Anyone Back Professionally

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(Washington, D.C.) – Congressman Glenn Grothman (R-Glenbeulah) today introduced a bill to significantly increase career opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act will roll back a misguided regulation that significantly narrowed Congress's definition of Competitive Integrated Employment and effectively reduced career opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

“Under my legislation, individuals with disabilities, after high school, can go to their local vocational rehabilitation agency to gain workplace skills, and then be referred by the agency to a job that fits their needs.”

“Yael Kerzan is a young lady from my district who was helped by this referral program and is concerned that others like her won't be able to enjoy the opportunities and experiences she's had since she was referred through her local agency in Portage, WI, 15-years ago.

“It has been invaluable for young people like Yael to have the choice and flexibility to work in a fulfilling job that provides them with the dignity they deserve as vital members of our communities. That is the reason I introduced the Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act.”

Background

In 2014, Congress passed the very popular Workforce Innovation and Opportunity

Act (WIOA), which made significantly positive improvements to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Unfortunately, despite the many improvements made in WIOA to improve coordination between workforce development programs and local businesses, the new law was used as an opportunity to regulate what Competitive Integrated Employment means for individuals with disabilities. In short, the 245-word definition for Competitive Integrated Employment was transformed it into 982 pages of preamble in the Federal Register and a 309-word definition in the Code of Federal Regulations.

There was then a rule created in 2015 that, in effect, limits the menu of jobs a vocational rehabilitation agency can refer individuals with disabilities to, often removing jobs that have equipment designed to help them perform to the best of their ability. As a result, our young people are too-often retired to the couch or worse, rather than being placed in a job that provides them with financial compensation, workforce experience, and a sense of dignity and respect that can only be derived from an honest day's work.

The Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act will provide clarity to the statutory definition of Competitive Integrated Employment in WIOA (originally in the Rehabilitation Act). Specifically, it will do so by stating that Competitive Integrated Employment includes contracts that are awarded under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act and state set-aside contracts, with the goal of improving employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It also clarifies that Competitive Integrated Employment includes work that involves social and interpersonal interactions with colleagues, vendors, customers, superiors, or other individuals that the employee may come into contact with during a given workday.