

U.S. Rep. Grothman: Bill to expand workplace choice for individuals with disabilities

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(Washington, D.C.) – Congressman Glenn Grothman (WI-06) has introduced the [Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act](#), a bill that will significantly increase career opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This legislation is endorsed by A-Team USA, a grassroots organization that advocates for individuals with disabilities.

*“With this legislation, individuals with disabilities will once again be able to go to their state vocational rehabilitation agency and be referred to a job or vocational training opportunity that fits their needs,” **said Grothman.** “Yael Kerzan is a young woman from my district who was helped by this referral program before Congress changed the rules. She is concerned that others like her won’t be able to enjoy the opportunities and experiences she has had since she was referred through her vocational rehabilitation agency in Portage 20 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. These obstacles faced by individuals with disabilities were brought to my attention by Yael and other disability advocate organizations, which is what led me to introduce this bill.

“After many meetings with these groups and tours of Community Rehabilitation Providers in Wisconsin’s Sixth District, such as RCS Empowers in Sheboygan and Lakeside Packaging in Neenah, it is obvious to see that individuals with disabilities want and deserve to have every employment option made available to them, and the right to choose which best fits their needs.”

“As a long time member of the A-Team USA, I am grateful for the efforts that Rep. Grothman is making to correct adverse effects from certain provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. My son, who has Down Syndrome, has greatly benefitted from his participation in work center based prevocational services. Rep. Grothman’s bills will correct problems in current law and enable intellectually disabled individuals like my son to have the choice of where they want to work,” **said Rick Wilson, A-Team USA.**

Background Information

Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) are essential to the well-being of individuals with disabilities because they provide employment and vocational training opportunities for these individuals in their communities. Through CRPs, individuals with disabilities have access to qualified rehabilitation professionals, employment security, and a social network. CRPs provide the individuals who work there more than simply a job and a wage — they provide a sense of purpose and a community that supports them. The rewards of being employed go far beyond just the employee, extending to the families of those with disabilities, the organizations they touch, and the entire surrounding community.

RCS Empowers in Sheboygan, Lakeside Packaging in Neenah, and Northwoods Inc. in Portage are three of eight CRPs in Wisconsin’s Sixth District who provide individuals with disabilities with the help, support, and stability they need.

Unfortunately, in 2014, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which, along with subsequent guidance, has taken away work opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Previously, CRPs qualified as competitive integrated employment (CIE), a term used to define employment that is integrated with the non-disabled workforce. Now, guidance from the Department of Education has narrowed the definition of CIE, which caused confusion for many state vocational rehabilitation agencies when referring individuals with disabilities to jobs at CRPs. As a result, many vocational rehabilitation agencies have since adopted a blanket denial approach that deprives individuals with disabilities from being referred to valuable employment opportunities at CRPs.

Grothman’s Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act will

correct the misguided regulatory and sub-regulatory guidance that restricted Congress's definition of CIE and reduced employment and vocational training opportunities for individuals with disabilities. CIE should include work that involves social and interpersonal interactions with colleagues, vendors, customers, superiors, or other individuals that the employee may encounter during the workday.

[Click here](#) for a list of the more than 60 CRPs in Wisconsin.