

July 19, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express strong opposition to any prohibition of the statutorily mandated inflationary increase to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) State grants program and any rescission of VR funding as part of fiscal year (FY) 2025 appropriations legislation. We urge the Committees to oppose the inclusion of these provisions. Such steps will have a negative cascading impact on State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies as they work on their State Plans and engage in fiscal forecasting. Also, it will make it harder for state legislative bodies to identify match sources when the statutorily mandated inflationary increase is reinstated. The statutorily mandated inflationary increase is critical to serving a record number of individuals with disabilities to enable them to secure competitive integrated employment and help support the workforce needs of businesses by supplying them with qualified candidates.

Over one million individuals with disabilities receive services annually through the VR program. Unfortunately, some States are unable to serve all individuals in need of services and must give priority to those with the most significant disabilities. The annual inflationary increase has become a critical component of program funding to ensure state agencies have the resources to cover the increased yearly costs of services. Many agencies also have to seek additional funding due to increased census and program capacity, since the end of the Public Health Emergency, as there continues to be steady and robust growth in VR participation rates of individuals with disabilities.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023 marked the highest recorded percentage of individuals with disabilities who were employed since data was first collected in 2008. Despite this progress, the rate of employment for individuals with disabilities is still 33 percent lower than for those without disabilities. Notwithstanding this recent progress in the employment rates of individuals with disabilities, any rescission effectively reduces funding for many states seeking to keep this momentum going to improve employment outcomes. The VR State grant programs bridge the unemployment gap and help fill the workforce void and maximize services offered to corporations and businesses to increase the number of people with disabilities working in their state.

For these reasons, we call on you to oppose any rescission of VR funding and not to set precedent by continuing the practice of deferring the annual inflationary increase for this program in FY 25 cycle and beyond. The resources provided to State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies are too valuable and already limited, and maintaining funding levels is crucial for advancing employment for individuals with disabilities. Should you have any questions, please contact Tonia Ferguson, Council of State

Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), at tferguson@csavr.org and Alex Nock, representing PACER Center, at anock@pennhillgroup.com.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Organizations

Access Ready, Inc.
Allies of Independence
American Occupational Therapy Association
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)
Association for Special Children and Families
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)
Autism Society of America
Autism Speaks
Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)
Cure SMA
Family Connections South Carolina
Family Resource Center for Disabilities and Special Needs
Family Voices NJ
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Disability Institute
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National Rehabilitation Association
PACER Center
Parent to Parent of Georgia
PEAK Parent Center
RespectAbility
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
SourceAmerica
TASH
The Advocacy Institute
The Arc of the United States
The Parents' Place of Maryland
United States International Council on Disabilities

CC: Chair Tammy Baldwin, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies; Ranking Member Shelley Moore Capito, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies; Chair Robert Aderholt, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies; Chair Bernie Sanders, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee; Ranking Member Bill Cassidy, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee; Chairwoman Virginia Foxx, House Committee on Education and the Workforce; Ranking Member Bobby Scott, House Committee on Education and the Workforce.