

**Please Oppose the Movement to Eliminate
Work Centers and 14(c) Wage Certificates for
Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

The Raise the Wage Act:

H.R. 582 – Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA)

S. 150 - Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-VT)

The Transformation to Competitive Employment Act:

H.R. 873 - Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA)

S. 260 – Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA)

Thousands of individuals with intellectual disabilities enjoy the opportunity to work in a specialized environment that nurtures them and accommodates their mental, physical and behavioral challenges, while rewarding them with specialized wages that, while not equal to full minimum wages, are appropriate to their level of productivity and their capacity to work. These opportunities rely on specialized wage certificates as provided for under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The employment usually takes place at facility-based work centers, sometimes referred to as sheltered workshops. These centers provide more than employment. They provide a protected atmosphere suited to the intellectual and behavioral challenges of the individuals who work there. They cater to a higher-needs population, which includes people who may have frequent seizures, who may act out physically, even violently, when stressed, or who may need help toileting or to have their adult diaper changed. This is a specialized environment for a special population.

In the first weeks of the 116th Congress, two bills have been introduced in the House and Senate that would eliminate these employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Proponents of these bills describe them as civil rights issues, asking:

“If a non-disabled person has the right to work for competitive wages, why should a person with intellectual disabilities be denied the right to work for full, competitive wages?”

This appears to be a perfectly reasonable question, until you think of the different forms of disability, and the severity of some intellectual disabilities. Then the matter becomes complicated, as not all disabilities are equal. A more accurate question would be:

“If a non-disabled person has the right to work for competitive wages, why should a person with intellectual disabilities who is capable of working at an equal capacity be denied the right to work for competitive wages? And why should a person who is not capable of working at a competitive capacity be denied the opportunity to perform any work at all?”

Why VOR opposes these bills:

The movement to promote competitive employment for disabled individuals, encompassing people with visual, auditory, and physical disabilities as well as many people with I/DD, is a noble effort, a true civil rights issue that is overdue. As a society, we *should be* creating opportunities for those who want to work, and who are capable of integrating into the mainstream and working at a competitive level. But the implications of these two bills echo the “one-size-fits-all” mentality that dominates the I/DD system and marginalizes those individuals who do not fit into the “one size” population. “One-size-ism” will never be appropriate disability policy. The I/DD population is too complex and diverse to be treated with simplistic, one-sized solutions.

Both of these bills are aimed at providing competitive, integrated employment opportunities for those capable of achieving this level of employment, but they also insist on eliminating the current opportunities provided for those not capable or not desiring this level of employment.

The thinking behind this movement is that work centers are bad things that limit the individual’s capacity, and that given the opportunity to work in a competitive, integrated environment, all individuals will rise to their full capacity. Proponents of this movement, when forced to admit that some people will be shut out or left behind, speak as though this is an “acceptable consequence” of their plan. It is not. These are human lives. These are not disposable, expendable individuals. These people have families who love them and want the best for them.

There is no reason to accept these “acceptable consequences”, especially when there is no correlation between eliminating 14(c) wage certificates and investing in employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.