



PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO SEEK JOB REFERRALS FROM STATE VR PROGRAMS DESERVE TO KNOW THE FULL RANGE OF JOBS AVAILABLE

BACKGROUND

Through the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the Department of Education provides formula grants to State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies to administer the [State VR Services](#) programs in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and four Territories. The State VR Services Program is authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). State VR programs provide VR services for individuals with disabilities — consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice — so that they may prepare for, and engage in, competitive integrated employment or supported employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

To be eligible for the VR program, individuals must have a physical or mental impairment that results in a substantial impediment to employment and who require and can benefit from VR services to achieve employment and maximize career goals. In 2019, the latest year for which data is available, [approximately 400,000 applicants](#) received referral support from the program.

THE ISSUE

Today, due to a controversial interpretation of WIOA, many State VR agencies will not refer qualified applicants to job openings with nonprofits serving people who are blind or have other disabilities simply because they participate in the federal AbilityOne Program. Furthermore, some State VR agencies refuse to provide support for eligible applicants seeking training for non-compensated opportunities, such as family caregiving.

The AbilityOne Program is the nation's leading creator of jobs for people who have significant disabilities, including blindness. More than 500 nonprofit agencies participating in the program employ over 42,000 individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities. Additionally, many people with disabilities choose to perform important and fulfilling roles that require training as non-compensated contributors to their families' livelihood.

To make matters worse, some State VR agencies won't even inform applicants of their full range of employment options, enforcing a sort of "gag rule" that limits the information vocational counselors are able to share with their applicants. This is despite the clear [mandate](#) of the RSA to provide the individuals they serve with "informed choice."

THE SOLUTION

Congress should amend the Rehabilitation Act to *require* State VR agencies to provide applicants with *all* the information available to them regarding appropriate job options, specifically including jobs offered by nonprofits participating in the AbilityOne Program and non-compensated employment options, such as family caregiving. This change would eliminate the "gag rule" that today prohibits many State Agency employment counselors from providing applicants with the ability to make a truly informed choice.