

Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program

May 28, 2008

MISSION

*To ensure
that the vocational
rehabilitation process is
open and responsive
to the needs of
Pennsylvanians
with disabilities.*

Stephen S. Pennington, Esq.
Executive Director

Jamie C. Ray, Esq.
Margaret P. McKenna, Esq.
Lee Lippi
Advocates

Lucinda Crissman
Outreach Coordinator

Philadelphia Office

1617 J.F.K. Boulevard
Suite 800
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Toll Free 1(888) 745-2357
TDD (215) 557-7112
Fax (215) 557-7602

Harrisburg Office

2 North 2nd Street
Suite 100
Harrisburg, PA 17101
Voice (717) 364-1733
TDD 1(888) 367-2954
Fax (717) 236-8800

info@equalemployment.org

Honorable Phyllis Mundy
Chairperson
Aging and Older Adult Services Committee

Honorable Tim Hennessey
Republican Chairperson

RE: HB 1743

Dear Representatives Mundy and Hennessey:

My name is Jamie C. Ray and I am an attorney with the Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program (CAP). CAP is the statewide advocate for persons with disabilities seeking services from the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. During my college and law school years was a client of OVR. I can speak first hand about the value of mentoring and its positive impact upon my life and career. Growing up, I was often told that my goal of becoming an attorney was not realistic because of my disability. I learned early on that I was being judged because of how I looked; not based upon my potential. I understand the frustration and hardship that comes from being written off. I can relate to the mothers in the welfare to work program who are trying to overcome obstacles in their life, to find and keep good work, and to become independent. Key to my success were individuals, who rather than stereotype me, chose to support me and my goals in life. I recognize that we all need help from time to time from people who are fair, willing to listen, and who are problem solvers. HB 1743 meets this need for citizens in the Commonwealth who have received welfare payments or who are low-wage workers.

CAP supports HB 1743. There is a strong parallel between the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Welfare to Work legislation passed in 1997. Both recognize that the key to helping people obtain, retain and advance in the workplace is to focus on meaningful individual outcomes. The shift away from a public benefit system to a system that relies upon establishing a partnership between the individual,

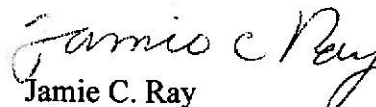
government, and the employer is the hallmark of the Rehabilitation Act and is the key to the success of many people with disabilities in the workplace. As with the Rehabilitation Act, the person in the welfare to work program has rights, but also has responsibilities. The proposed mentoring program is a way of helping that person meet those responsibilities and succeed.

The impact of HB 1743 will be seen both by the employer and the employee. Businesses that have entry level jobs and experience high turnover rates find that the key to maintaining a stable workforce is to solve an employee's problem before it gets too serious. With a mentor, employees will remain on the job and this means the employer will not have to hire a new employee and bear that cost. As the Kansas program has taught us, many problems are easily solved with the help of a senior mentor. HB 1743 fills a void not addressed in the workplace or the community.

Our seniors are a natural resource to help those struggling to become independent. These seniors are perceived as fair and neutral by both the employer and the employee. This is an essential part of resolving workplace issues. Because of their experience, they are problem solvers, listeners, and helpers. They are also a resource to the person and can help the individual set goals.

We live in difficult economic times. HB 1743 is pro taxpayer, pro business and pro employee. The Kansas program has demonstrated that a senior mentoring program can be cost effective from the taxpayer's point of view, will save the employer the costs associated with rehiring and retraining, and will help the employee become independent and a taxpayer. HB 1743 is a win-win situation.

Respectfully,


Jamie C. Ray