



Giant Eagle, Inc.

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Pennsylvania House of Representatives Labor and Industry Committee

Hearing HB 2405

Hello, my name is Jeremy Shapira and I am the Senior Director and HR Business Partner at Giant Eagle, headquartered in Pittsburgh. Giant Eagle employs over 17,000 Team Members in 234 food, pharmacy and fuel retail locations in western and central Pennsylvania. We have a 30-year history of employing people with disabilities and are respected in the community as a leader for this cause. For the past year, we have partnered with the United Way on 21 and Able, a revolutionary project that focuses on helping high school students with disabilities gain skills in a competitive, professional environment. Having this experience prior to leaving school is critical for increasing their ability to live independently later in life. For 17 of the 30 students hired so far in this program, this is their first job and the first opportunity to earn a paycheck.

Through a partnership with Blind and Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, Giant Eagle now has a full-time staff member who is a professional in the field of disabilities. We refer to this position as the Career Transition Liaison or CTL. The CTL's responsibilities include partnering with local high schools and parents to identify qualified candidates, facilitating the selection process and coordinating on-the-job coaching.

Additionally, the CTL works with Giant Eagle teams to help them understand how to best work with their new team members with disabilities.

The key to a successful strategy to hiring people with disabilities is to focus on abilities rather than what someone might not be able to do. As a result of this philosophy, Giant Eagle has been able to hire 21 and Able participants into a very broad range of positions in our stores including meat wrapper, prepared foods clerk, cashier, and car wash operator. As I said before, we hired 30 students in the first year, 18 of which are still happily employed. Retention mirrors that of our general population, and I am thrilled to say that not one of the students we are working with has been unable to perform the tasks required in their jobs.

Being so close to the work has allowed me to see how programs like this are invaluable in helping students with disabilities transition to productive employment and in turn become an integral part of Giant Eagle's business and a presence in our community. In our experience, our Team Members with disabilities have extremely strong work ethics, are excited to be a part of our family and love serving our customers. Because of that, they are valued and appreciated by their fellow Team Members and the customers who look forward to seeing them in the store. It's a win for the Team Member and a win for our company. Having a structured program in place has allowed us to engage and employ more students with disabilities in a shorter amount of time than ever before. This is important because the longer young adults spend at home without the guidance of transition programs like 21 and Able, the more likely they are to just stay at home. I firmly believe that the funding of these programs enriches the lives of our Team Members, the Company and our community and is critical to supporting a diverse workplace.