



Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disability

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TESTIMONY

House Bill 2130 of 2015-2016 Regular Session

Presented to the
House of Representatives Labor & Industry Committee

By:
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PAR (Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disability)

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Thank you Chairwoman Gingrich, Chairman Galloway, and members of the House Labor & Industry Committee for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 2130.

My name is Shirley Walker. I am the President and CEO of PAR. PAR is the short name for Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disability.

PAR supports this bill. My testimony will suggest ways to strengthen the bill to help ensure that the vision of competitive employment for individuals our members support is realized..

House Bill 2130 comes at a historic moment in Pennsylvania's history. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the MH/MR Act which Pennsylvania's legislature passed in 1966. The act gave individuals with disabilities the right to live in home and community based settings rather than state institutions. Since PAR's inception 46 years ago, our members have provided most of the non-institutional community services provided for in the Act to individuals with autism or intellectual disability. With that pivotal legislation we have achieved an amazing transformation during the last 50 years from institutional to community services. The next giant leap for people with disabilities is a real chance at competitive employment.

Government policy and funding barriers have worked against achieving the goal of employment and have blocked any significant movement in that direction. This bill, with amendments, could help remove those barriers.

PAR offers several recommendations for your consideration to make the Bill more capable of achieving our mutual goal of making competitive employment for Pennsylvanians with disabilities reachable.

1. The state can lead by example, such as the bill giving the Governor's Office of Administration new authority and a directive to increase the hiring of individuals with disability in state government and to achieve goals such as those being required at the federal level and in other states. For example,
 - a. the bill could establish a 7% hiring target for commonwealth employment for individuals with disabilities
 - b. the bill could establish a similar requirement in all state contracts, or alternatively require that they demonstrate how they will recruit, hire, train, and retain individuals with disabilities
 - c. the bill could establish a job classification specifically for individuals with disability to promote customized employment, which encourages matching the needs of the employer to the strengths of the applicant instead of maintaining the current inflexible job classifications currently in civil service.
 - d. the state could become a model employer for individuals with disability by consulting with experts in the intellectual and developmental disability field and with human resources experts to identify what works best when applying, interviewing, and performing a job. This would include structural, technological, and communication accessibility.

2. Without establishing authority and accountability, having a new advisory committee may only result in more meetings that government officials must attend without achieving real results. Therefore, PAR recommends that the council appoint one of the secretaries as a point person who would coordinate and take responsibility for the council's outcomes. In addition, PAR recommends that the council provide an annual report to the general assembly detailing the coordination efforts among state agencies and the employment outcomes that resulted from their efforts.
3. The bill could charge the Department of Education to embrace competitive employment by increasing opportunities for students with a disability to get paid work experience before leaving high school. This would greatly increase their chances of gaining employment after graduation. As a former chief administrator in the education system, I can attest that we have been providing paid work experiences for students without disabilities for decades. Pennsylvania is way past due in offering the same to students with disabilities.
4. To support competitive employment for people with disabilities, policies and resources must be directed to providers to enable them to develop the service capacity needed to make the connections with employers and provide the support to individuals to sustain competitive employment. Government policies including new service definitions and rates that enable this direction must be developed for this next giant leap to be achieved. Right now, providers lose funding for an individual once they place the individual in a job. But without continuous support most individuals and employers cannot sustain the relationship. The policies and rates that are established by the state need to recognize that for people with disabilities to succeed in competitive employment, providers need ongoing funding after the initial job placement. Individuals who have an intellectual disability or autism have ongoing needs for emotional, behavioral, and developmental support which do

not end just because they have a job. Frequently, individuals must choose between two necessary services; support for work or support they need for everyday living. This legislation is an opportunity for the stakeholders and the council of department secretaries to establish ways to encourage and then monitor new policies and new funding methodologies to ensure that they produce lasting employment outcomes.

5. State agencies need to partner with service providers to learn how the bureaucracies of the various departments are creating barriers for individuals achieving employment. They need to work together to create new policies and funding structures that will remove those barriers and they need to be held accountable for outcomes.
6. This legislation can help ensure that parents and potential employers alike are educated on the opportunities and benefits of employing persons with disabilities. We recommend that an ongoing media campaign be developed in coordination with providers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities.
7. We also recommend that the Department of Labor and Industry's JobGateway online job matching portal, which took millions in government funds to develop, integrate the goals of this legislation in its online presence to promote people with disabilities for jobs.

Pennsylvania's legislature made all of the difference 50 years ago with the passage of the MH/ID Act of 1966. We encourage you to strengthen this legislation to stimulate the next giant leap forward for people with disabilities to obtain and keep competitive employment.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our support for this Bill and to offer our recommendations. Please use PAR as a resource as you move this forward. Thank you!