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August 3rd, 2016 – RespectAbility – Comments – Illinois Employment First Strategic Plan

Introduction:

RespectAbility is pleased to submit the following comments to the Illinois Task Force on Employment and Economic Opportunity. These comments build on our previous testimony on [the State of Illinois's Unified State Plan](#) as required under Section 102 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). We are pleased to have this opportunity to offer our comments, raise questions, and provide our suggestions.

[The Chicago Community Trust](#), [the Independent Living Movement](#) and others in Illinois have done some important strategic work on employment for people with disabilities. Furthermore, your state already has several model programs such as [Project SEARCH](#) and [Bridges from School to Work](#) that are doing amazing work. **However, Illinois currently ranks only 27th in the nation in terms of jobs for people with disabilities.** Clearly, more needs to be done to expand opportunities for young people with disabilities. Last year, [Chicago hosted a kickoff for the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative](#), a new collaboration among employers focused on recruiting youth with barriers to employment. More than 5,000 people attended and nearly 1,000 youth got jobs. Despite this incredible opportunity, leaders from the disability community were not invited to attend. We recognize that there are significant challenges facing Governor Rauner and the people of Illinois, but we hope that your state's renewed focus on Employment First will provide ever greater opportunities for competitive, integrated employment, especially for young people with disabilities. **Only 35.7% of the 691,000 working age Illinoisans with disabilities are employed and huge numbers are living on government benefits.** **Additionally, there are over 46,000 youth with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 20 in Illinois. Each year a quarter of them will age out of school into an uncertain future.**

Our comments on your Strategic Plan focus on the key areas of Transition from School to Work, Workforce Development, and Employer Engagement. Each of these Work Groups has a critical role to play in aligning systems to improve outcomes for people with disabilities in Illinois. Each of these key groups can maximize their impact by adopting best practices and implementing lessons learned in other states. We hope that our comments and resources can help Illinois coordinate these efforts and maximize the potential of people with disabilities.

Transition Work Group Comments:

One of the most critical steps to improving the employment rates of Illinoisans with disabilities is to prioritize resources where they will have the most significant impact. In terms of Employment First in Illinois and better serving your states' 46,000 youth with disabilities, this means improving the quantity and quality of chances those young people have to successfully transition out of the classroom and into the workforce. As we wrote in the [Disability Employment First Planning Toolkit](#), ensuring that the employment of people with disabilities is beneficial for individuals, businesses, and the state itself takes talent, training, coordination and devoted resources. We feel that the efforts and resources needed to make this a reality in Illinois are well reflected in the efforts of the Transition Work Group.

First, RespectAbility is pleased to see the wide membership and diverse composition of the Transition Work Group outlined in the Strategic Plan. It is especially important that your state's Juvenile Justice is involved on this point. As documented by the PACER Center in [Students with Disabilities & the Juvenile Justice System](#), "20 percent of the youth with

emotional and behavioral disorders were arrested while in secondary school, approximately 13 percent of juvenile offenders had developmental disabilities and 36 percent had learning disabilities.” We know from our research that [Illinois’s Department of Juvenile Justice has recently begun to implement a “Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument \(YASI\)”](#) to assess the needs of justice involved youth. As your Transition Work Group looks at the issues involved with disability and the Juvenile Justice system, we encourage you to look at our recent report about how to add the disability lens to criminal justice issues. Our report, [Disability and Criminal Justice Reform: Keys to Success](#), was recently profiled in [US News and World Report](#) as well as [the PBS NewsHour](#), and contains valuable information on the issue of youth in the justice system. We hope common ground and opportunities for collaboration can be thoughtfully addressed as the Transition Work Group moves forward.

Second, as we wrote in our Toolkit, another key to success is the expectation of employment for people with disabilities, rather than an expected reliance on benefits. These high expectations must begin early on with educators themselves inside the school system. Thus, we are pleased to see the Work Group’s recommendation to make “LBS II Transition Specialist (see, 23 Ill. Adm. Code 25.43 (e)(1)) training more widely available in Illinois.” The other critical components of high expectations are parents and young students with disabilities. As such, we are pleased to see that “in-service training for students, families and others developing and improving awareness of transition services” is listed among the Work Group’s recommendations. Free online sources such as the [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#), [Understood.org](#) and the [Job Accommodation Network](#) are important resources that can provide valuable materials.

Third, we are pleased to see the consistent commitment to data-driven decision making. The simple truth is that what gets measured gets done. “Continuous improvement based on data” will require having access to the right data from the right sources whether it is the educational, vocational or workforce system. As an example of the type of data that should guide you work, we have included in our comments [a copy of your state’s data on disability and employment](#). As your Tasks Force moves forward, we encourage you to look at where things stand now for people with disabilities in Illinois. As we wrote in our comments on Illinois’ Unified State Plan, it is highly illustrative to look at the experience of those with disabilities who are succeeding in the workforce. From the data, we find that only 46% of the 60,000 Illinoisans who are blind or have vision loss are employed, and that 57.6% of the 75,000 with hearing differences are employed. We also see that only 25.1% of Illinoisans with intellectual or developmental disabilities are employed. For this demographic, workforce solutions may take more time and resources in the immediate future, but will yield positive results for all in the long run. There will be a considerable financial and human return on investment if Illinois expands successful school to work transition programs such as Project Search or Bridges from School to Work.

Workforce Development Work Group Comments:

Our discussion of the importance of data provides a natural transition point to discuss the efforts of the Task Force’s Workforce Development group. We are pleased with the priority placed on aligning the “current Workforce Development System with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).” As stated before, we encourage you to review our comments on Illinois’ Unified State Plan for ways to think about adding the disability lens to your state’s workforce system.

One of the most significant ways that we feel Illinois and the Employment First effort can achieve great employment outcomes is by focusing on the economic forecasts and projected job growth outlined in your WIOA plan. Ensuring that youth with disabilities have the opportunity to enter emerging or growing career fields is an example of adopting the type of “sector strategy” at the heart of WIOA. We feel that it is important to train and prepare young Illinoisans with disabilities to pursue careers in health/eldercare, STEM and transportation/logistics. People with disabilities represent an untapped labor resource that, with the right training and supports, can meet the diverse talent needs of Illinois’s growing job sectors. The jobs gains in these sectors offer a great opportunity for focused sector strategies to sustain and build on employment outcomes being achieved among people with disabilities.

Illinois’ State Plan projects extensive job growth in the fields of “Health Care & Social Assistance.” This sector is projected to have a 15.7% increase in growth with a projected 107,596 jobs added by 2022, the second largest projected increase of any sector in Illinois. People with disabilities can and should be part of the solution to this critical demand in the labor market. It is important for healthcare institutions to reflect their customers, and people with disabilities have frequent interactions with the healthcare system. There are [numerous examples of young people with disabilities doing incredible work in the fields of healthcare, elder care, and in assisted living](#). Employers working in health and elder care can greatly benefit from the loyalty, dedication, and high retention rates of employees with disabilities.

Nationally, Project Search sites overall have been achieving outstanding results for people with disabilities, employers, and taxpayers alike. The goal for each program participant is competitive employment. We suggest that you look to follow the example set by the state of Wisconsin where they started with three Project Search sites and are expanding to 27. The experiences of the dedicated state officials, VR counselors, workforce professionals, and special educators who have increased Wisconsin’s Project Search programs offer profound insight into the steps necessary to make rapid expansion a reality. Thinking long-term, investments in Project Search and other such programs will save money for taxpayers while also strengthening the talent pool for employers.

Exciting opportunities for improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities lay in the fields related to STEM jobs which are also a growing part of Illinois’s economy. As has been documented in many cases, there can be an “Autism Advantage” in the STEM space. Indeed, some people on the Autism spectrum can have the very best skills in science, math and engineering. [Microsoft, SAP, and Specialisterne](#) have committed themselves to “[provide employment opportunities for people on the autism spectrum in roles such as software testers, programmers, system administrators, and data quality assurance specialists.](#)” [The Israeli Defense Forces recruits and trains their citizens on the Autism spectrum for work in their elite intelligence unit.](#)

Delaware’s Governor Jack Markell is partnering with companies to employ more people on the Autism spectrum in STEM jobs. Such examples need to be implemented by Illinois as well. This issue of STEM and access for students with disabilities is a natural point of partnership between the workforce system and the education system. That collaboration needs to start early on in the process, be matched with high expectations for success, and be designed to ensure people with disabilities have the chance to become future scientists, engineers, doctors and mathematicians.

Ensuring the Accessibility of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Programs and Careers for People with Disabilities, especially for students with IEPs, is vital. As Carol Glazer of the National Organization on Disabilities wrote in the *Huffington Post*, [“America is already lagging when it comes to STEM-skilled workers. The U.S. will have more than 1.2 million job openings in STEM fields by 2018.”](#) Governors in other states have looked at STEM needs and begun to develop solutions. For example, [in New York, Governor Cuomo has ensured that magnet schools for STEM are located near IBM, a major STEM employer in their state.](#) Illinois should follow this model. Together, Illinois’s workforce and education systems can look to supported-employment programs such as Project Search, Specialisterne, and [the Marriot Foundation's Bridges to Work Program](#) as models for developing a systematic approach to providing the supports necessary for our students on the autism spectrum to excel in STEM.

Sitting beside the Mississippi and astride the interstate highway system, logistics is a sector of growing importance to Illinois’ economy. The “Skills Gaps Analysis” of the State Plan states on page 20 that “Chicago metro area creates more than 5,000 of these middle-skill jobs in TDL each year.” In the following section on “Targeted Populations” the Plan discuss how people with barriers to work “will require more targeted initiatives.”

As you embark on such initiatives and collaborations, we encourage the Employment First Task Force to explore proven programs such as Amazon, UPS, and Pepsi. The global logistics companies UPS, at one of their busiest facilities, has a training program dedicated to preparing youth with disabilities to succeed. Taking place in Louisville, KY, [The Transitional Learning Center is the result of a partnership between an employer, the school system, and vocational rehabilitation.](#) Pre-training programs are great because they offer the opportunity to train youth with disabilities in the soft skills they need to succeed and provide them with a foundation of work experience. Thus, as your Task Force looks to expand job training programs and employer collaborations, we suggest you prioritize the sectors discussed above.

The untapped potential of Illinoisans with disabilities is such that a full-spectrum, all-of-the-above-and-more approach is needed. While our priority is seeing the talents of people with disabilities channeled into the private sector, employment opportunities in the public sector should not be neglected. As such, we are very pleased to see developing “strategies to make the State a Model Employer” as priority number two for this Work Group. The importance of such a step was first discussed in Governor Markell’s *Better Bottom Line* Initiative. In Governor Markell’s own words, [“One key action is to set a state goal for hiring people with disabilities through an executive order and hold agencies accountable for achieving that goal.”](#) We look forward to seeing the efforts and results of making this policy a reality.

Improving the accessibility of the workforce system was a priority written into the heart of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. However, how far states go to meet the letter of the law depends on state-level implementation. We are deeply pleased to see the commitments made to both programmatic and physical accessibility woven throughout your Employment First Strategic Plan. In our view, creating “standing committees on accessibility and youth services” could be a clear way to break down silos and build partnerships to provide job seekers with disabilities greater access to Illinois’s workforce system.

Even as we make these recommendations, we acknowledge the fact that there are significant budgetary challenges facing Governor Rauner and the people of Illinois. Thus, we are pleased to see the priority given to valuable but free resources such as ODEP and their Employment First Community of Practice. Further, we suggest that Illinois look to the

experiences of its neighboring states as a guide for what works in the real world. Among Illinois's neighbors, [we see a wide diversity of outcomes both positive and negative in terms of jobs for people with disabilities](#). On the one hand, Illinois borders [Iowa which is ranked 3rd in the country in terms of jobs for people with disabilities](#). [The Hawkeye State is also home to many best practices and innovative programs](#). Likewise, Illinois is close to Wisconsin, where their [Governor has worked hard to expand school to work transition programs for students with disabilities](#). At the same time, Illinois shares a border with Kentucky where barely 27.3 percent of their citizens with disabilities are employed, so there is much to commend your state on.

Employer Engagement Work Group Comments:

As Illinois works hard to join the ranks of other states that have adopted Employment First policies, we feel it is critical for you to learn from the experience of other states, both positive and negative. Maine has been viewed by some as a model state because it has Employment First policies enshrined both in executive order and in state legislation. However, when you look at the gap between the employment rate of people with disabilities and those without disabilities, Maine comes dead last in the country.

Improving employment outcomes in Illinois very much depends on being an employer driven paradigm shift. It is vital to constantly emphasize and re-emphasize the business case for hiring people with disabilities for a simple reason. Government action alone--even through vocation rehabilitation -- is insufficient to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. The necessary condition for achieving greater competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities is engaging employers and meeting their talent needs.

As such we are disappointed to see the limited attention given to one of the most important assets that Illinois has in terms of making the business case for hiring people with disabilities. [The Chicagoland Business Leadership Network is a new affiliate chapter of the national BLN and should be included at the WIOA table](#). To quote the affiliate chapter's Mission Statement, the CBLN exists to "educate, engage and inform businesses on critical disability issues." It operates as a non-profit, non-partisan business-to-business network that raises awareness and works to advance, improve and expand employment outcomes for people with disabilities in the Chicagoland area. While their priority of focus rests on the city of Chicago and the surrounding six counties, this group has valuable connections and experiences that need to be at the Employment First table.

Conclusion:

As we stated at the beginning of our comments, Illinois has the opportunity to do much better on jobs for people with disabilities, especially for youth. There is a lot of innovative and dedicated work being done to implement Employment First policies. Our public comments serve to build upon this work to help Illinois to significantly improve employment outcomes.

The bottom line is that expanding job opportunities for people with disabilities is beneficial for employers, taxpayers and people with disabilities alike. It is good for employers because the loyalty, talent, and skills of workers with disabilities contribute to the employers' bottom line. It is good for the workforce system because improving services and supports for job seeker with disabilities will benefit others with different barriers to employment. It is good for people with disabilities who want the dignity, pride, friendships, independence and income that work provides. We are happy to answer any questions you have and assist you in any way.



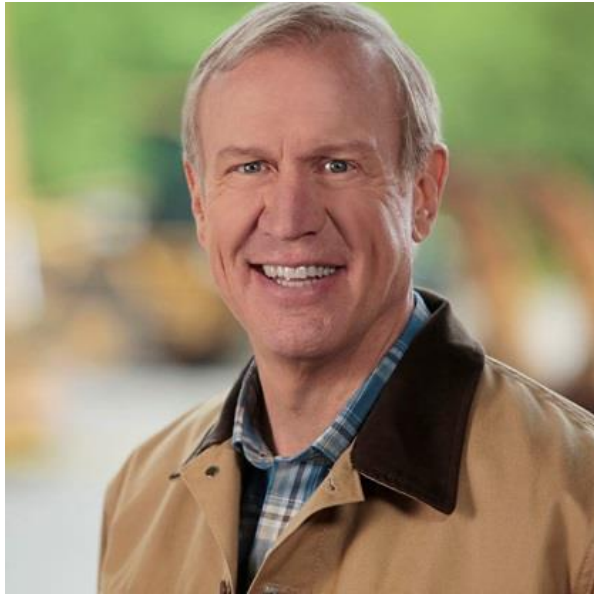
RESPECTABILITY

IL and Jobs for PwDs

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, President

www.RespectAbilityUSA.org

Illinois



Gov. Bruce Rauner (R)

- ❖ 75.7% of persons without disabilities aged 18 to 64 are employed.³
- ❖ 35.7% of PwDs aged 18 to 64 are employed.³
- ❖ 46,400 persons aged 16 to 20 have a disability.¹
- ❖ 691,000 persons aged 21 to 64 have a disability.¹
- ❖ **Illinois ranks 27th in the nation in terms of employment for PwDs.³**
- ❖ **There is a 40 percentage point gap in the employment rates between people with and without disabilities in Illinois³**
- ❖ 1,381,787 PwDs live in IL.³
- ❖ The employment gap between people with and without disabilities increased by 1.1% between 2013 and 2014.³
- ❖ 341,132 people between 18 and 64 received SSDI or SSI benefits in IL in 2014.³
- ❖ In December 2014, the total expenditure on SSDI benefits for PwDs in IL was \$384,836,000.³
- ❖ Voc. Rehab. obtained 5,511 jobs² (out of 16,200 applicants)³ for PwDs in IL in 2013.

1. 2013 Disability Status Report: Illinois, disabilitystatistics.org
2. StateData: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes, 2014
3. [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium](#)

Illinois Data

		People with Disabilities (%)		People without Disabilities (%)	
		2013 ¹	2014 ²	2013 ¹	2014 ²
Poverty	US	28.7	28.2	13.6	13.0
	IL	26.7	27.1	12.4	12.1
Smoking	US	25.4	24.5	16.2	15.3
	IL	24.3	19.7	16.6	15.7
Obesity	US	40.1	41.1	25.0	25.2
	IL	45.0	46.1	25.6	25.3
Employment	US	33.9	34.4	74.2	75.4
	IL	36.1	35.7	75.0	75.7

1. [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, 2014](#)

2. [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, 2015](#)

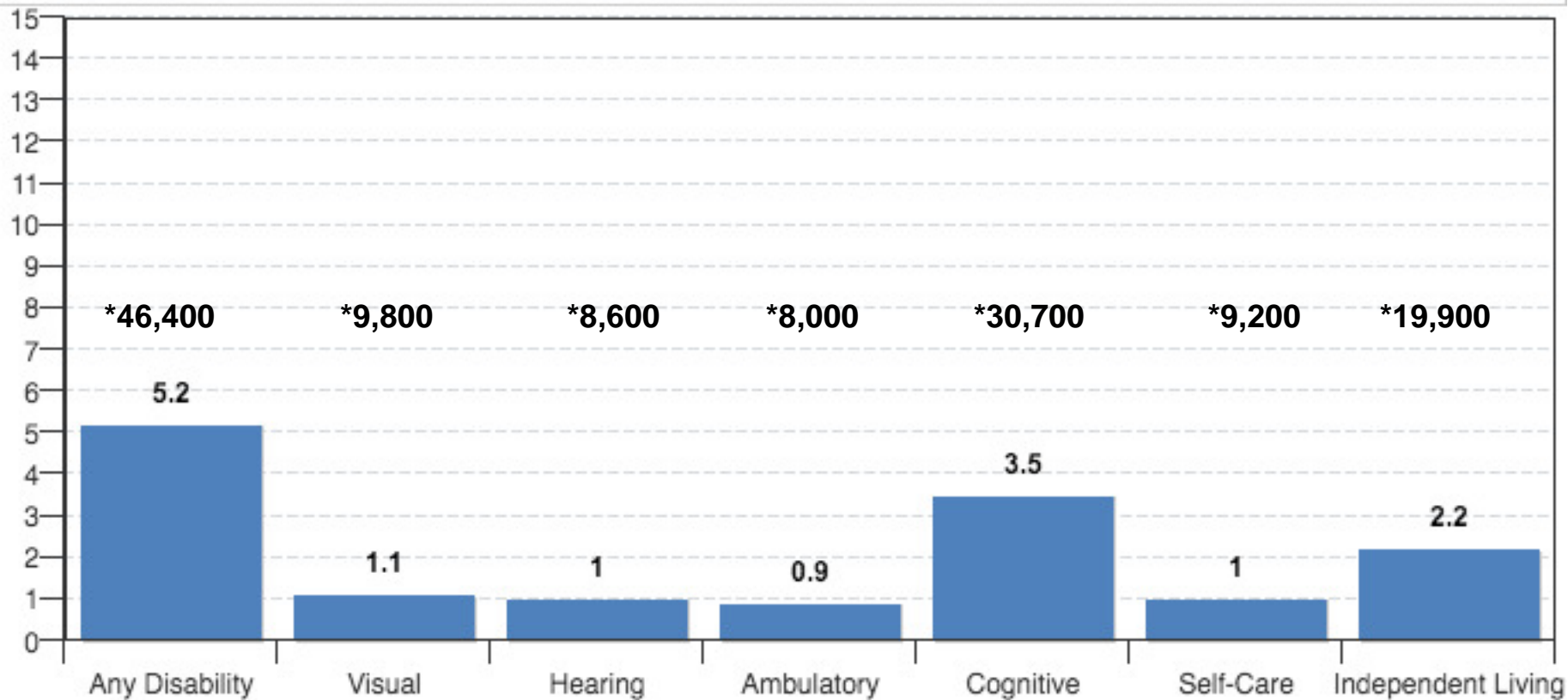
Ages 6 to 21 IEPs by Category in IL

	2012	2013
All Disabilities	255,219	255,219
Specific Learning Disability	104,971	104,083
Speech or Language Impairment	43,227	41,099
Intellectual Disability	18,459	17,999
Emotional Disturbance	20,192	19,758
Multiple Disability	2,106	17,999
Hearing Impairment	3,378	3,376
Orthopedic Impairment	1,431	1,345
Other Health Impairment	28,559	30,526
Visual Impairment	1,058	1,054
Autism	17,272	18,749
Deaf Blindness	26	24
Traumatic Brain Injury	674	688
Developmental Delay	13,866	15,672

Source: [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium](#)

Prevalence of Disability Among Non-Institutionalized People Ages 16 to 20 in Illinois in 2013

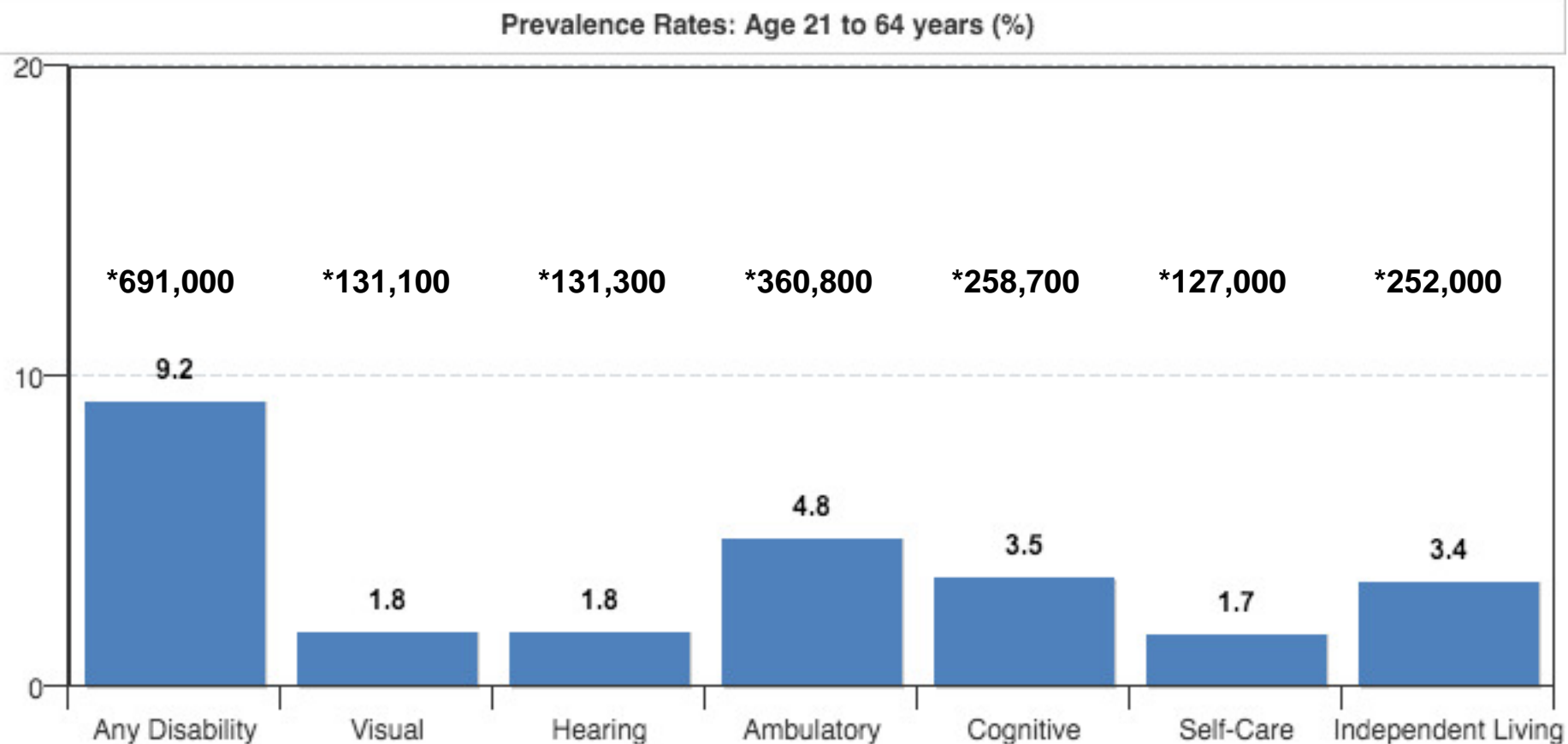
Prevalence Rates: Age 16 to 20 years (%)



*Total numbers reported

Source: [Cornell University](#)

Prevalence of Disability Among Non-Institutionalized People Ages 21 to 64 in Illinois in 2013

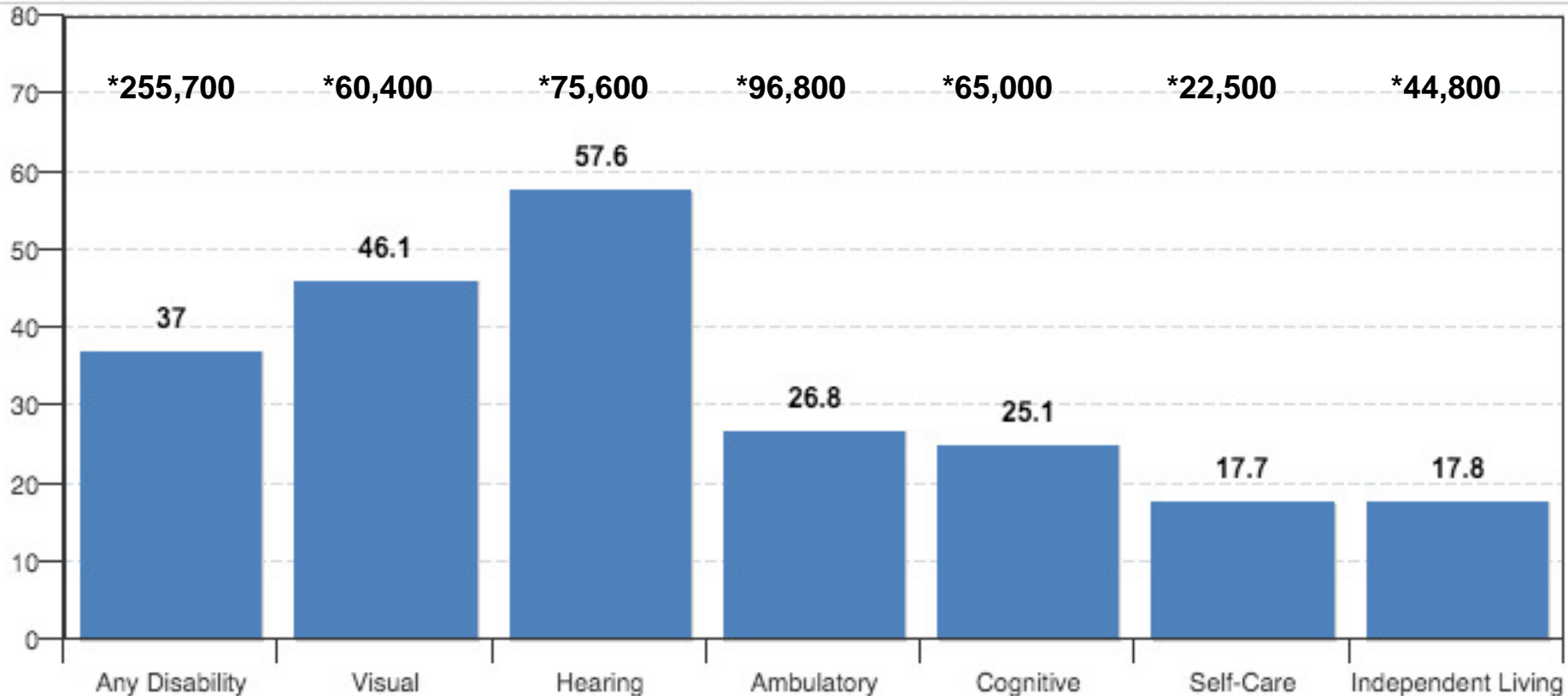


*Total numbers reported

Source: [Cornell University](#)

Employment of Non-Institutionalized Working-Age People (Ages 21 to 64) by Disability Status in Illinois in 2013

Employment Rates (%)



*Total numbers reported

Source: [Cornell University](#)

Project SEARCH: Program Description

- ❖ One school year or 9 months.
- ❖ 10 – 12 young adults with a variety of intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- ❖ Instructor and job coaches.
- ❖ Immersed in host business culture.
- ❖ Rotations through unpaid internships with continual feedback.
- ❖ Outcome of employment in the community.

IL Project SEARCH Sites

- ❖ Adventist LaGrange Memorial Hospital (LaGrange)
- ❖ AMITA Health Adventist Bolingbrook Hospital (Bolingbrook)
- ❖ Central DuPage Hospital (Winfield)
- ❖ Delnor Hospital (Geneva)
- ❖ Northwestern University (Evanston)

Contact: molly.michels@cchmc.org

Which Employers in Your State Must Meet 503 Rules (Hire PwDs)?

❖ Top contractors:

- NAVISTAR INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION
- UCHICAGO ARGONNE LLC
- NORTHROP GRUMMAN CORPORATION
- CATERPILLAR INC.
- FERMI RESEARCH ALLIANCE LLC

See the entire list on the [Fedspending website](#)¹

Complete federal lists of 2006-2014 → [Federal Procurement Data System website](#)²

How to get started: Job Accommodation Network → <https://askjan.org/>

US Business Leadership Network → <http://usbln.org/>

Jobs in Illinois

❖ Illinois' top growth industries are:

- Green energy, agriculture, healthcare/ healthcare IT, transportation/distribution/logistics and manufacturing.

Source: http://workforceinvestmentworks.com/workforce_board_info.asp?st=IL

❖ Click for your Workforce Development Board

http://workforceinvestmentworks.com/workforce_board_info.asp?st=IL

❖ Click for your Workforce Development Plan

http://www.doleta.gov/performance/results/AnnualReports/annual_report.cfm

Resources

- ❖ Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, 2015:
http://www.disabilitycompendium.org/docs/default-source/2015-compendium/compendium_2015_final.pdf
- ❖ StateData: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes, 2014 (data from 2013):
<http://www.statedata.info/bbstates/Illinois.pdf>
- ❖ 2013 Disability Status Report United States, Cornell University:
www.disabilitystatistics.org
- ❖ Fedspending: www.fedspending.org
- ❖ Project SEARCH: www.projectsearch.us
- ❖ Job Accommodation Network: <https://askjan.org/>
- ❖ State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency:
<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=29737>
- ❖ RespectAbilityUSA: www.respectabilityusa.org

Let Us Know If We Can Help!

We have many resources for policy makers and employers on our website and are ready to help!

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