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Feb. 9, 2016

## RespectAbility – Public Comments – Nevada Unified State Plan

*“Every Nevadan who has the desire to go to work should be able to do so without being hindered because of a disability. My administration and DETR have been working on this initiative for some time. As we prepare to celebrate Labor Day and with this order, the state is reaffirming our commitment to providing opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the economic growth of this state and including all Nevadans in workforce development activities.”*

– Governor Brian Sandoval, Sandoval Signs [Executive Order](#) to Provide Opportunities for Disabled Workers, August 20, 2013.

RespectAbility is pleased to submit the following comments regarding the current draft of Nevada’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 our questions, and provide our suggestions about the content of the state plan.

**Nevada is so ahead of many states in terms of expanding competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities.** According to the most recent, publically available Census data, Nevada ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in the nation as measured by the employment rate of people with disabilities. **Fully 40.9 percent of the 201,717 working age people with disabilities are employed in Nevada. Because of your good work, the 8,200 youth with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 21 living in Nevada have increasing chances to successfully transition into the world of work.** Another measure of the significant strides that the Silver State has been making is the decreasing gap in the labor force participation rates between people with and without disabilities. **Nevada has the second smallest employment gap amounting to only 33.4 percentage points and is only surpassed by North Dakota.**

Nevada shows the nation how committed leadership, coordinated resources, and best practices can empower more people with disabilities to pursue the American Dream. The Silver State has much to teach the rest of the nation as do [states such as the Dakotas, Alaska, and Wyoming](#). Indeed, the Rehabilitation Division of Nevada’s Department of Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) is at the forefront of [innovative programs](#) focused on employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. In particular, we want to give a big shout out to the work being done at Nevada VR by Shelly Hendren and Janice Johns. They are tireless advocates and have been real drivers in improving outcomes for young Nevadans with disabilities.

These efforts are very well reflected in the current draft of Nevada’s Unified State Plan. The Plan as written will significantly improve Nevada’s workforce system and its ability to serve people with barriers to employment. This draft plan will capitalize on the partnerships and collaborations necessary to empower youth transitioning from school to work and to solve challenges created by limited resources. However, no plan is perfect and there remain a few areas where improvements still can be made to achieve the best results possible. **Our public comments on Nevada’s WIOA State Plan are structured around those points where greater clarity, precision, and data are needed to ensure that people with disabilities will be better equipped to pursue the American Dream.**

**1. It is vital to include the gaps in Labor Force Participation Rates (LFPRs) and other key data in your State Plan, dashboards and performance metrics:**

Tracking unemployment information (which only reflects people actively looking for jobs) and job placements (which only monitors people who interface directly with the workforce system) is necessary, but not sufficient to drive true performance metrics that will create success.

This fact is recognized in the current draft of Nevada’s Unified State Plan. On page 6, the Plan reports that “Nevada’s labor force participation rate started trending upward in the first half of 2015” and that “The recent change in direction in the participation rate is encouraging and shows the increasing health of Nevada’s economy.” **We appreciate this recognition and it is precisely why we encourage Nevada to use the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of people with disabilities as a key metric to ensure the success of WIOA in your state.**

However, we also believe that it is critical to include precise statistics on the size and composition of the disability community in Nevada. While we appreciate the data points that were included on page 3 in the “Economic and Workforce Analysis” section of your state plan, we feel that more specific data points are needed. As we reported at the beginning of our public comments, fully 40.9 working age Nevadans with disabilities are employed compared to the 73.8% employment rate for those without disabilities. There remains however a 33.6 percentage point gap in the Labor Force Participation Rates (LFPR) between people with and without disabilities. This gap is a critical data point that needs to be included in your Unified State Plan and it needs to drive the development of your state performance metrics. Closing this gap will require the focused energy and effort of your workforce system.

We want to help you state to sustain the great results that you have achieve so far. After all, Nevada should take great pride in ranking 10<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of jobs for people with disabilities. We believe that with more focused work, Nevada can continue rising in the ranks and empowering more people with disabilities to pursue the independence that jobs provide. Good data is essential for any attempt to increase the number of people with disabilities who are succeeding in competitive, integrated employed. **As an example of the data that is needed, below are several charts which show the challenge in your state.**

**Figure 1.**

**Nevada Performance Metrics on Jobs for PWDs**



Gov. Brian Sandoval  
(R)

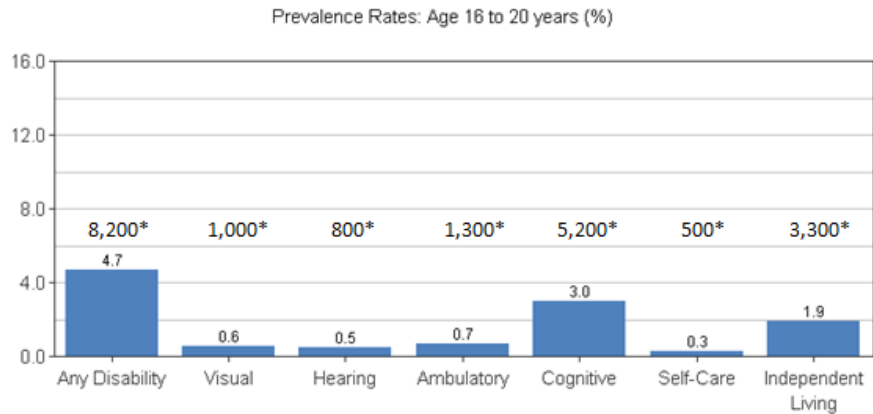
- ❖ 74.3% of persons without disabilities aged 18 to 64 are employed.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ 40.9% of PwDs aged 18 to 64 are employed.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ **Nevada ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of employment for PwDs.<sup>3</sup>**
- ❖ **There remains a 33.4 percentage point gap in the labor force participation rate (LFPR) between people with and without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>**
- ❖ 375,321 persons in NV have a disability.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ 11,300 persons aged 16 to 20 have a disability.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ 189,000 persons aged 21 to 64 have a disability.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Voc. Rehab. received 3,047 applicants in NV in 2013.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Voc. Rehab. obtained 749 jobs for PwDs in NV in 2013.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ In 2014 NV’s total expenditure on SSDI benefits was \$1,005,408,000.<sup>3</sup>

1. 2013 Disability Status Report: Nevada, [disabilitystatistics.org](http://disabilitystatistics.org)  
2. State Data: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes, 2013  
3. [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium](#)

We recommend that the draft plan be revised to include several more data points regarding the disability community in Nevada. **Below are the data points that we believe should be added to your state plan to enhance it:**

- a. **Youth with disabilities who are aging in the workforce (ages 16-20).** If your state’s workforce system is to seriously deliver on the promise to improve transitions to work for youth, it is critical to know how many youth with disabilities will be aging out of school.

**Figure 2.**  
**Prevalence of Disability Among Non-Institutionalized People**  
**Ages 16 to 20 in Nevada in 2012**

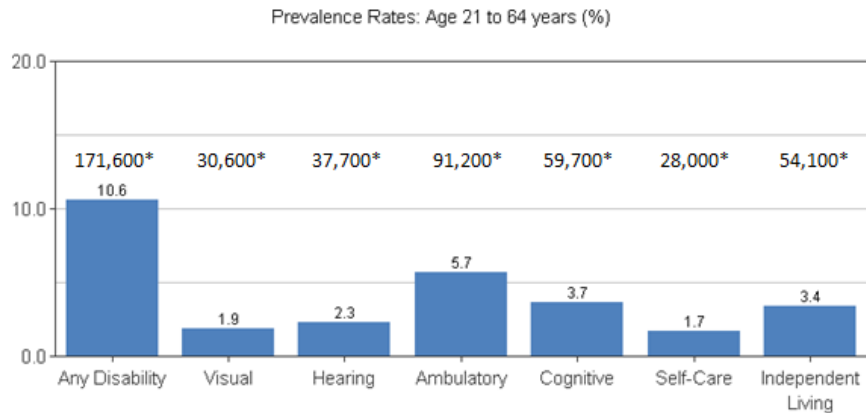


\*Total numbers reported

Source: [Cornell University](#)

- b. **Working age people with disabilities (ages 21-64).** According to the most recent available data from the Census Bureau, there are 171,000 working age Nevadans with disabilities between the ages of 21 and 64. It is critical to distinguish between working age people with disabilities and those we acquire disabilities due to the aging process. The chart below shows the diverse range of disabilities experienced in your state.

**Figure 3.**  
**Prevalence of Disability Among Non-Institutionalized People**  
**Ages 21 to 64 in Nevada in 2013**



\*Total numbers reported

Source: [Cornell University](#)

- c. **What types of disabilities do youth have who are transitioning into the workforce?** This type of information is critical important because youth with vision, mobility and hearing disabilities need specific types of tools and training, but may otherwise be ready for high skill, high wage jobs. To support the success of youth with cognitive disabilities, it will be critical for Nevada to expand early work experiences, skill training, and job placements.

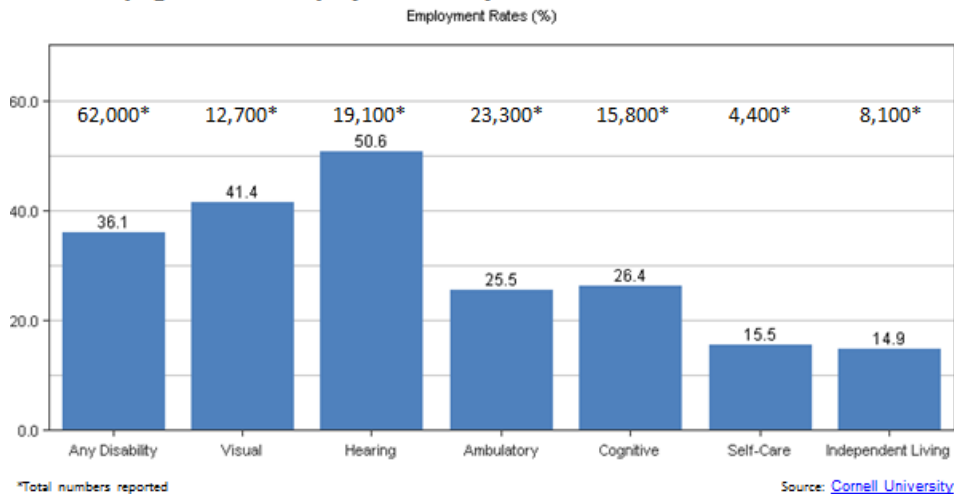
**Figure 4.**  
**NV Ages 6 to 21 Served Under IDEA**

	2012	2013
All Disabilities	42,285	43,811
Specific Learning Disability	22,261	22,969
Speech or Language Impairment	6,444	6,584
Intellectual Disability	1,883	1,884
Emotional Disturbance	1,881	1,833
Multiple Disability	1,072	1,123
Hearing Impairment	442	435
Orthopedic Impairment	280	286
Other Health Impairment	3,883	4,129
Visual Impairment	139	134
Autism	3,820	4,156
Deaf Blindness	8	8
Traumatic Brain Injury	172	180
Developmental Delay	Omitted	Omitted

Source: [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium](#)

- d. **Labor Force Participation Rates broken down by disability type.** From the data, we often find that people who are blind or have vision loss are employed at higher rates than people with self-care or independent living disabilities. Similarly, we find that people with hearing differences are also employed at higher rates than are people with intellectual or developmental disabilities

**Figure 5.**  
**Employment of Non-Institutionalized Working-Age People (Ages 21 to 64) by Disability Status in Nevada in 2013**



From our review of the current draft of Nevada’s Unified State Plan, it is clear your workforce system understands the critical importance of tracking the Labor Force Participation

Rate. We add to this understanding our perspective that comparing the gap in the LFPR between people with and without disabilities helps guide the system to push for improved outcomes.

We are optimistic that Nevada will sustain the employment it has already achieved and built towards continuing opportunities. We are hopeful because of information included in the State Plan such as Figure 11 on page 34. This figure, in the Title IV section of the Unified State Plan, shows the “Labor Force Projections of Individuals with Disabilities.” No other State Plan we have reviewed has included labor force projections out through the rest of the decade.

Nevada is already at the forefront nationally in terms of innovative youth programs such as the cluster model developed through a public-private partnership supported by the Poses Family Foundation and the Kessler Foundation. In order to sustain the outcomes that your state has already achieved and to empower more Nevadans with disabilities to pursue the American Dream, the right investments in the right programs need to be made. From our perspective, for example, there is a significant opportunity to rapid expand school to work transition programs like Project Search. We are encouraged by the program development discussed on pages 168 and 173. However, this opportunity needs to be met with ambition and expanded effort in order for Nevada to continue moving the needle on employment outcomes. We have more to say on this point later in our public comments.

## **2. Busting Stigmas, Myths, and Misconceptions Should Be a Key Part of Workforce Strategy:**

Low expectations and misconceptions are critical barriers to employment for people with disabilities. [A Princeton study shows that while people with disabilities are seen as warm, they are not seen as competent.](#) Similarly, [a study published by Cornell Hospitality Quarterly found that companies share a concern that people with disabilities cannot adequately do the work required of their employees.](#)

We commend Governor Sandoval’s effort to bring [media attention to the issue of disability employment, to visit model employers,](#) and to [make Nevada’s state government a model employer for people with disabilities.](#) He follows the example set by governors in others states such as Jack Markell of Delaware, Jay Inslee of Washington, and Scott Walker of Wisconsin. **This type of systematic and ongoing communications campaign must continue if you want to maximize your state’s success.** It is an effort that needs to be address through your Unified State plan.

**As such, we recommend that State Plans be amended to include a comprehensive, proactive communications/public relations strategy for reducing such stigmas.** The best way to fight stigmas is to let employers see the facts from other employers who are already succeeding by hiring people with disabilities. **In order to ensure that such efforts have the biggest possible impact, it needs to be supported by a serious, systematic and ongoing communications campaign that highlights the benefits of inclusive hiring.**

In terms of potential employer partners, we encourage your state plan to look at [Disability Equality Index that assesses the inclusion and hiring efforts of major employers.](#) It was put together by the United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN) which operates [a network of affiliates across the country that can be an incredible resource for your work.](#) However, it should be a component of Nevada’s planning and implementation of a serious business-to-business PR effort. The companies which scored 100% in the USBLN index can be a great resource. These are Ameren Corporation, AT&T, Booz Allen Hamilton Inc., Capital One Financial Corporation, Comcast, NBC Universal, Ernst & Young LLP, Florida Blue, Freddie Mac, Highmark Health, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Lockheed Martin Corporation, Northrop

Grumman Corporation, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC), Procter & Gamble, Qualcomm, Sprint Corporation, Starbucks, and TD Bank N.A.

Polls and focus groups show that there are three types of messages and audiences that are needed to expand employment for people with disabilities. Serious communications campaigns are needed for all three:

- A. CEOs/business leaders need to understand the value proposition/business case for their specific company as to why they should focus on putting people with disabilities into their talent pipelines.** This is best done through business-to-business success stories. People with disabilities can work successfully in hotels, healthcare, tend our parks and facilities, assist aging seniors, and they can be super talents in developing computer software and engineering solutions. CEOs and business leaders need to know that people with disabilities can be the BEST people to get a job done.
  
- B. Human resources professionals and on-the-ground supervisors need to understand that hiring people with disabilities is generally easy and inexpensive, and that any costs incurred are more than offset from increased loyalty.** Hiring managers and supervisors are key players who can turn high minded policy and business goals into action at the ground level. However, studies show that many are uninformed about people with disabilities. They are afraid of potential legal action, costs, or other failures. They need supports that will empower them to overcome their own fears and to excel at recruiting, hiring, supervising, or working with teammates who have disabilities. VR staff and community agencies can fully support human resources professionals and managers in dealing with their own specific fears and stigmas surrounding hiring people with disabilities, and should do so, given that they are one of the few states who have opted to go for a dual-customer approach at their program centers. Moreover, online and in-person training is readily available to help from a variety of sources. RespectAbility has online webinars, as [does ASKJAN.org](#), USDOL and others. Partners like [the Poses Family Foundation Workplace Initiative](#) can provide training to the workforce staff and volunteers systems-wide as well as to community agencies in supporting companies through messaging efforts around related to fear and stigma. [The National Organization on Disability](#) and [the U.S. Business Leadership Network](#) offer strong resources as well.
  
- C. People with disabilities and their families need high expectations. From the time of diagnosis, education for high expectation must begin. Nevada needs a public relations campaign that will inspire Nevadans with disabilities to set their hopes high, as low expectations and low self-esteem are a barrier to employment.** For example, Virgin Airways founder Sir Richard Branson and finance wizard Charles Schwab are also dyslexic. Scientist Stephen Hawking and multi-billionaire businessman Sheldon Adelson, like Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas and President Franklin D. Roosevelt before them, are wheelchair/mobility device users. Arthur Young, co-founder of the giant EY (formerly Ernst & Young) was deaf. **Beyond the beauty of Lake Tahoe and the Grand Canyon, there is little more iconic about Nevada than gleaming hotels and shining casinos. As it happens one of Nevada's most successful business men is a person with a disability. The CEO of Wynn Casinos, [Steve Wynn, is legally blind.](#)** These are the type of success stories that people with disabilities need and this is something the workforce system should seriously utilize.

As an example of the power and value of making the business care for hiring people with disabilities, we offer Nevada the insights gained from our [#RespectTheAbility](#) campaign. The campaign focuses on how hiring people with disabilities can make organizations stronger and more successful. It highlights the benefits to employers that look beyond the disability and imagine the possibility when hiring talented employees with disabilities.

We seriously encourage your workforce system to collaborate with the model employers mentioned by name in your Unified State Plan. Office Depot, Starbucks, and PepsiCo have done incredible work and should be at the forefront of any communications effort. Their success and their experiences collaborating with Nevada DETR can showcase the business case for hiring employees with disabilities and they can discuss how such effort benefit their bottom line.

The energy and attention that such national companies bring to inclusive employment efforts is important. However, there is also a critical place for discussing the experiences of smaller employers. A great example of what we have in mind is located in the Reno area. [Smiling with Hope Pizza was recently profiled in the local news](#) and provides great example of [how positive press coverage is an important part of showcasing the talents of employees with disabilities](#). Addressing stigma in a sustained, strategic way needs to be part of Nevada's larger effort to empower people to overcome barriers to employment. You have the leaders who care and the employer who can tell their stories. We have high hopes that you can succeed in this effort.

### **3. Strong Sector Strategies- The need for strategic alignment of workforce development and economic development to expand employment for people with disabilities:**

As required by WIOA Sec. 102(b)(1)(A), State Plans must include a detailed analysis of the economic sectors of the state economy that are growing and are forecasted to grow in the future. The success of WIOA depends on being an employer driven paradigm shift. Expanding opportunities for people with barriers to employment such as disability requires strong partnerships with employers in those sectors which are rapidly expanding.

Returning to page 3 and the "Economic and Workforce Analysis", we find a clear summary of the growing segments of Nevada's economy. To quote this section: "Leisure and hospitality is the largest employment sector in the economy", followed by the "Trade, transportation and utilities industries and occupations" and "professional and business services." We also find a well-structured list of "Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations" on page 7 of your Unified State Plan. Here we see the actual growth rates lists for jobs in each of these sectors. Further, we also find that Education and health services" is growing steadily and that this sector is "expected to add a significant amount of jobs" in the years ahead. Lastly, we also see high-turnover jobs in food preparation and retail trade rightly described as a "super sector" helping to drive the Silver State's economy.

We submit to you that there are significant opportunities in each of these growth areas for sector strategies focused on training Nevadans with disabilities to succeed. Indeed, Nevadans with disabilities, especially youth, are an untapped labor resource. The job gains in these sectors offer a great opportunity for Nevada's workforce system to expand opportunities and achieve incredible outcomes for people with disabilities.

#### **a. High Turnover Jobs: Hospitality/Accommodations, Food Service, Retail Trade:**

Millions of dollars are lost each year due to employee turnover. [For all jobs earning less than \\$50,000 per year, the average cost of replacing one employee is between \\$6,000 and \\$20,000](#). Research shows that employees with disabilities, when their interests and abilities are aligned with the needs of employers, are more productive and loyal than their non-disabled

peers. Company records show that even when the relatively more expensive accommodations were factored in, the overall costs of disability accommodations were far outweighed by the low turnover rates and better tenures of the employees with disabilities.

As stated on page 3 of the State Plan “Leisure and hospitality is the largest employment sector” in Nevada’s economy. Further, “leisure and hospitality has grown by more jobs than any other sector adding 18,000 jobs in September 2015.” Lastly, “according to the current employment statistics program” this sector is “growing at an annual average of 5.3 percent.” Given these facts, we seriously encourage your workforce system to recognize the potential alignment between the talent needs of the hospitality industry and the capabilities of Nevadans with disabilities. **In other states, the Project Search model has helped to train and prepare youth with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual and developmental differences, for successful careers in accommodations and food service.** This a good fit because these are extremely high turnover jobs and numerous studies show that people with disabilities can be outstanding in those fields and have significantly higher employer loyalty. **As such, we recommend that in thinking through how to provide Nevada’s “Leisure and hospitality” sector with the talent it needs, efforts to train youth with disabilities be prioritized.**

An outstanding example of the type of work needed is found in Missouri. As part of the Poses Family Foundation’s Workplace Initiative, a coalition of employment service providers has launched a successful training and placement program with the hospitality sector in St. Louis. This training runs for up to 12 weeks, and takes place on site at the hotel; all participants are paid by the hotel for the duration of training. Since the summer of 2015, two cohorts of trainees have completed training at the Hyatt Regency. Trainees have gone on to permanent employment at the Hyatt and other hotel partners in a range of departments—culinary; auditing; and customer service. This type of training and Poses’ Workplace Initiative could easily be part of your overall Sector Strategies. Likewise, in other states, [hotels and other hospitality employers have found Project SEARCH to be an amazing source of talent. The work done by Embassy Suites and David Scott](#) in Omaha, Nebraska offers [valuable lessons Nevada can look to in order to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities](#). Your State Board, along with other components of the workforce system, should connect with employers in the hospitality sector to begin figuring out how to benefit from these models.

**Another sector of Nevada’s economy, with high turnover and big potential, is retail trade.** Already, the collaborative work being done by VR, DSU, and OfficeMax/Office Depot has resulted in VR clients who have transitioned into employment in the retail sector. (This program is discussed in depth on pages 165 and 172 of your State Plan.) These successes should be leveraged into further opportunities where Nevadans with disabilities can run through a “customized pre-employment training program”, “learn in a classroom setting” and are trained in “in a hands-on, real work environment.” We encourage your workforce system to recruit and partner with other employers in the retail space where the higher retention rates of employees with disabilities can positively impact the company’s bottom line. It is important to identify more specific opportunities with employers and to cite them inside the plan, as well as the criteria by which to continue and to expand such partnerships in the future.

#### **b. Health and Elder Care:**

The State Plan very clearly states the factors which are driving job growth in healthcare. To quote page 15 of the State Plan, “Demographics are the main driver of the growth in the number of jobs in the health care and social assistance sectors.” The projected job growth in this sector is astounding. The State Plan projects “an additional 4,100 jobs in 2015, 4,300 jobs in 2016 and 4,600 jobs in 2017.”



The rapid emerging talent needs in health care represent both a challenge and an opportunity for Nevada's workforce system. **It is challenge propelled by an aging population resulting in increasing demand for qualified workers ready to fill the talent needs of hospitals, assisted living centers, and nursing home. It is opportunity to channel the incredible talents of people with disabilities into the workforce.** This is a topic that needs to be examined closely and has implications for people with disabilities who want to work.

**Nevadans with disabilities, especially youth, can and should be part of the solution to this demand in the labor market.** A 2014 report from the [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#) (ODEP) captured this opportunity clearly, saying that “[people with disabilities] not only represent an untapped talent pool, but also offer significant value and insight” in the field of healthcare.. It is important for healthcare institutions to reflect their customers, and people with disabilities interface more 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 retention rates of employees with disabilities.**

**These examples all reflect how the Project Search model is well suited to meeting the growing talent needs in healthcare and social assistance in Nevada.** As discussed on page 173 of your State Plan, Project Search in Nevada is current located at “Sunrise Hospital”, “UNLV”, and “the Regional Transportation Center (RTC).” These are great sites and the work CCSD and DSU have done here is important. However, we feel there are significant opportunities for expanding Project Search to meet emerging talents needs in healthcare and social assistance. **We encourage Nevada to follow the example of Wisconsin, Florida, and other states that are rapidly expanding Project Search.**

Nationally, each year approximately 2,700 such young people, spread out in 45 states, do a nine month, school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. This innovative, business-led model features total workplace immersion, which facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and worksite-based training and support. Nationally, Project Search sites overall have been achieving outstanding results for people with disabilities, employers, and taxpayers alike. For example, [the first longitudinal study of the program found “a 68% success rate in transitioning students from high school into competitive employment” and “Project SEARCH sites in Upstate New York that have an impressive 83% success rate overall.”](#) The goal for each program participant is competitive integrated employment. Thinking long-term, investments in Project Search and other such programs will save big money for taxpayers while also strengthening the talent pool for employers.

**c. Science, Tech, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and The Autism Advantage:**

Even though other sectors are driving the growth of Nevada's economy, it is still important look at the issue of preparing workers for careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). **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.**

Companies including [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 other states. This issue of STEM and access for student with disabilities is a natural point of partnership between the workforce system and the educational system. That work needs to start young, be matched with high expectations for success, and 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 Students with IEPs, is vital.** As Carol Glazer of the National Organization on Disabilities wrote in *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 State Governor Cuomo has ensured that magnet schools for STEM are located near IBM, a major STEM employer in their state.](#) Other states should be looking at ways to follow this model. Together, state workforce system and educational system 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.

**d. Jobs with state government and state contracting can also be sources of opportunity:**

While the focus of our comments on the State Plans are around aligning the workforce system to create opportunities for people with disabilities in the private sector, public sector employment should not be neglected. As such, [we commend Governor Sandoval for his efforts to hire people with disabilities for jobs in state government.](#) The importance of such hiring efforts 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.](#)"

Further, we are also pleased that "[state also conducts the Preferred Purchase Program which streamlines governmental purchasing by allowing state and local government agencies to bypass the competitive bid process and purchase goods and services from registered community training centers which employ people with disabilities.](#)" **The untapped potential of people with disabilities is such that a full-spectrum, all-of-the-above-and-more approach is needed.** We are pleased to see that Nevada has made a serious commitment to expanding public sector opportunities for people with disabilities.

**4. Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act and Federal Contractors offer states the chance to innovate, collaborate, and expand opportunity:**

**We are pleased to have found that Nevada's Unified State Plan directly addressed the challenges and opportunities created by the new regulation around Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act. This is a unique business opportunity that demands a strategy focused on competitive advantage, not just compliance.**

We are encouraged to see a reference to Section 503 on page 28 where the "Ability to capitalize on the new rules for the sec. 503 of the Rehabilitation Act regarding federal contractors who hire people with disabilities" is listed as strength of VR in Nevada. Further, we are also pleased to find a reference to Section 503 on 194 where it talks about "Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting

individuals with disabilities” by “leveraging the requirements in the new regulations for sec. 503” These strengths and commitments put Nevada far ahead of other states in terms of 503.

Almost all of the state plans that we have reviewed have neglected to mention important rules surrounding the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Most State Plans lack references to the employment opportunities and talent challenges created by the recently implemented Section 503 regulations regarding federal contractors and subcontractors. With very few exceptions (Florida for example), the state plans do not discuss at all the new 7% utilization goal set for companies to recruit, hire, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities in all job categories.

Moving forward, we hope that Nevada’s workforce system prioritizes building partnership with those federal contractors doing business in your state. For example, Sierra Nevada Corp, National Security Technologies LLC, Battlespace Flight Services LLC, G4S Corporate Services LTD, and Corrections Corporation of America should be high priorities in terms of employer engagement. Moving forward, we hope that Nevada VR and other elements of the workforce system will collaborate to build partnerships with these contractors. Additional information on federal contractors in the Silver State can be [found here](#).

**Section 503 is an opportunity that could potentially have a broad impact on the employer engagement work of the entire workforce system.** The companies who must comply with Section 503 have an opportunity to teach companies not impacted by the regulations how to effectively employ, engage, and retain workers or customers with disabilities.

#### **5. Ensure that the Assurances in Your WIOA Checklist are matched up to a strategy to fully implement them and be successful:**

The Common Assurances listed on page 102 of Nevada’s Unified State Plan will be critical factors in the overall implementation and ultimate success of WIOA. **As such, it is critical that each assurance is matched up with a strategy fitted to meeting and, if possible, exceeding the requirements of the law.**

For example, it is critical that the assurances listed on page 127 for Title 1-B Programs are matched up to specific strategies to achieve the “delivery of career and training services to individuals.” Further, the Wagner-Peyser Assurances on page 139 need careful implementation efforts as do the Adult Basic Education Assurances listed on page 155 and the VR assurances on pages 206 through 211.

As a good example of the level of detail needed here, consider WIOA Section 188. The anti-discriminatory rules originally outlined under WIA need to be updated to reflect the steps needed towards making universal access a reality. **For example, in seeking to meet Common Assurance #7 listed in the State Plan on page 101, we are directing states to consider the resources made available from the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). [They have recently released a guide that digs deep into what universal accessibility will mean for the workforce system.](#)** Further, Common Assurance #10 affirms each state plan’s commitment to meeting the requirement that “one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.” **However, merely meeting legal requirements should not be the end of this process. Indeed, looking at physical and programmatic accessibility can be an opportunity to invest in a more proactive workforce system very actively committed to collaboration and partnerships.** If there is no plan that specifically identifies how the state is going to get to the commitment made in the assurance; the state is facing a serious problem.

## **6. Avoid the Opportunity Costs of Focusing Too Much on One-Stop Centers.**

### **Programmatic and Database Accessibility and Privacy is Critically Important:**

Public policy is about the allocation of scarce resources to meet infinite needs. It is vital to invest resources on those points where they can have the greatest effect. **One challenge that we have seen in many states WIOA plan has been the prioritization of expensive bricks and mortar One-Stops as the primary access point for programs and services under WIOA.** Focusing exhaustively on One-Stop Centers, physical infrastructure, and co-locating services comes at the opportunity cost of losing the chance to improve supports and increase outcomes.

**The workforce needs of state economies are evolving rapidly thanks to technology and globalization.** Investing excessive resources on physical locations at the expense of improving online delivery of workforce services and supports is an example of looking backwards, not forwards. Moreover, [the District of Columbia and others have successfully moved much of their one-stop services to trained staff with laptops that go to schools, hospitals, and community organizations where they are better able to serve the public.](#)

At the same time considerable thought needs to take place around the creation of a unified intake system for the workforce system and government benefits programs. Those shared databases must be fully accessible to people with disabilities who use screen readers or who need captions to understand videos that explain how to use the system. Thought also needs to go into privacy issues as private disability issues should not be shared where it is not needed and appropriate.

## **7. Creating an affiliate chapter of the US Business Leadership Network could be a great tool for engaging more employers and reaching the right business audience:**

On page 172 in section (g), the current draft of the Unified State Plan describes existing and emerging opportunities for outreach to employers in Nevada. In particular, this section describes the fruits of the hard work that Nevada VR has done partnerships with such diverse employers such as Starbucks, Pepsi, and OfficeMax/Office Depot. We are familiar with these efforts and we regularly suggest to other states that they have much to learn from Nevada. Additionally, we were very excited to learn about your “new training program Arrow Electronics in Reno, Nevada.”

Effective employer engagement, as we have stated previously in our public comments, is a necessary component of achieving improved employment outcomes. We congratulate for the hard work described on page 172 and we look forward to seeing the results of your “Innovation and Expansion Projects for 2016” described on page 195. Nevada DETR has already developed a network of engaged businesses who understand the competitive advantage that employees with disabilities can bring to the workforce. Business to business communication can help tear down the misconceptions and stigmas which are barriers to employment.

As such, we hope that in the months ahead your employer partners will consider translating their collaboration with Nevada VR into becoming an affiliate chapter of the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN). You already have great employer partners and your successes would only be enhanced by connecting to the critical work being done by the BLNs in many states.

Establishing a BLN Chapter in does would help to organize the “knowledge of community outreach, recruiting and interviewing, the accommodation process and barriers” needed to sustain and expand the employment outcomes Nevada has already achieved.

Therefore we suggest that Nevada look to the successes achieved in Wyoming, which possesses one of the most effective affiliate chapters in the country. The Wyoming BLN, despite the challenges of a largely rural population and limited resources, has been achieving outstanding

employment outcomes. We would be happy to provide Nevada's WIOA team with an introduction to Lynn Kirkbride the USBLN's Director of Affiliate Relations. She is an incredible asset and has extensive experience around overcoming barriers to employment. Her email is [lynn@usbln.org](mailto:lynn@usbln.org) and she can be reached by phone at (307) 631-0894. Her efforts, and those of the Wyoming BLN, offer profound insights into how to effectively engage employers around the business case for hiring people with disabilities.

#### **8. Ensure that Apprenticeship Programs are Fully Accessible and Actively Recruiting Young People with Disabilities, Especially with Government Contractors:**

One of the often-neglected opportunities for people with disabilities is training opportunities offered by apprenticeship programs. **We are pleased that Nevada is looking to expand the vital opportunity that apprenticeship training can offer to young people with disabilities.** We are pleased that the Nevada Unified State Plan includes an extensive discussion of the "Nevada Career Pathways system" on page 41, makes a commitment to "Partner with local businesses and training providers (colleges, universities, and apprenticeship trades) to gather business intelligence" on page 42, and addresses "activities leading to postsecondary credentials" through "pre-apprenticeship programs" on page 69.

As Nevada looks to improve these programs, we highly recommend that the workforce system seriously look at ways to make apprenticeships accessible to people with disabilities. At the federal level, the Office of Disability Employment Policy has worked hard to generate resources which can open up these exciting programs to "youth and young adults with a full range of disabilities." The regulations related to apprenticeship which have recently come out of the Department of Labor provide states the flexibility they need to refine and design training programs that maximally inclusive of people with diverse talents. [We encourage you to invest time and energy to understand the best practices contained in ODEP's apprenticeship toolkit.](#) [Further, we would also highly recommend that VR staff connect and collaborate with the Federal officer responsible for apprenticeship programs in your state or region.](#) Such innovative partnerships and improved accessibility are essential elements of realization the full promise of WIOA for people with disabilities.

Further, we would suggest that there is a critical opportunity to look at Section 503 and federal contractors as a partner in expanding apprenticeship programs. Funding to cover training costs could be a very attractive selling point for federal contractors looking to meet their 503 requirement. Further, we would also recommend looking at the intersection of apprenticeships and sector strategies. Not only can apprenticeships be set up in traditional fields such as construction, but they can also be incredibly useful in health care and computer jobs. Look at the successes achieved by Project SEARCH at a wide range of employers. As such, we recommend that the workforce system and the State Board investigate how to both open apprenticeship programs to people with disabilities and to create apprenticeship opportunities in new career fields as well.

#### **9. Overcome the gap between disability services and career services in Post-Secondary Education:**

**There is a fundamental disconnect in most post-secondary education programs between disability services and careers.** This is not a new issue and it is one that other organizations have raised in the past. However, with the priorities put into place by the implementation of WIOA, there is a historic opportunity to bridge this gap and to improve career and technical education for young people with and without differences. As formulated by the National Organization on Disability, at most educational institutions, "the career services

office, which assists students in preparing for” the workforce [“lack a strong—or any—connection to the office of disabled student services, which ensures proper accessibility and accommodations on campus for students with disabilities.”](#)

The result is a price we pay as a society is twofold. First, it costs employers who are unable to find qualified job candidates. Second, it costs students with disabilities who may be able to graduate with a degree thanks to accommodations but will go on to struggle to succeed in the working world. Nationally, there are 1.3 million young Americans ages 16-20 with disabilities. [They have high expectations to go into the workforce but currently only 53% of college graduates with disabilities are employed](#) as opposed to 84% of graduates with no disability. In total, only about 7% of people with disabilities will earn a college degree and less than half of the 2.3 million with a degree are employed.

[Due to the mandate created by Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, federal contractors now have a utilization goal to make sure that 7% of their employees across all job groups be qualified people with disabilities.](#) This regulation is actually a huge opportunity because companies are actively looking to hire recent graduates with disabilities. The first place for new recruits is college and campus recruiting. Your state has the chance to demonstrate to business that college students with disabilities are on campuses and that they should be actively targeting those with disabilities just as they do all other diversity recruiting on college campuses.

While the statistics cited above are national ones, they have bearing on the work that needs to be done through your community college system. Beyond just WIOA, community colleges are uniquely positioned to innovate in order to expand opportunity. Community colleges are very closely connected to the working world and the specific training requirements of employers.

## **10. Getting Out the Word on Free and Accessible Services and Resources:**

**There are many online and in person resources to help employers and people with disabilities come together to build success.** However, all the stakeholders need to be educated to know that these resources exist, and that they are free and user-friendly. These resources must also all be accessible. We know that broadband access is a huge issue in rural states. However, it’s important to ensure that online resources enhance the effort of your workforce system.

**Your state needs to make an effort to demonstrate to employers and prospective employees that these services exist. Doing so by coordinating it with the possible public relations campaign is one way to go about this. Also, your state should be careful not to waste money trying to re-invent the wheel in creating online resources as [ASKJAN.org](#), [the US Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment](#) Policy, [our organization and others also offer free toolkits, webinars and training opportunities](#). [Another resource is Understood.org](#).** This is a comprehensive resource to help families and individuals with learning and attention issues build their educational and career plans. It will be helpful to collaborate with those groups however to ensure that the best tools are created to fit the training and information needs on these issues.

## **11. Nothing About Us Without Us:**

**“Nothing About Us without Us” has long been a rallying cry for the one-in-five Americans who have a disability and it has implications for the workforce system.** Section 107 of WIOA dictates the establishment, criteria, and membership for the Local Workforce Development Boards that are crucial implementers of each state’s overall workforce strategy. **As such, we feel there is a critical need to ensure that people with disabilities are represented on such local boards and make their voices heard.** Section 107(b)(2)(A)(iii) of WIOA

specifically states that “community-based organizations that have demonstrated experience and expertise in 9 addressing the employment needs of individuals with barriers to employment” may be represented on the boards and this includes “organizations....that provide or support competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.”

Even a non-voting, ex-officio member of a WIB can bring critical perspectives that improve the WIB’s efforts overall. As such, we recommend that states look for ways to recruit local community organizations or self-advocates for inclusion on their local boards. Perhaps this could be a natural point of partnership for Independent Living Centers across the country that do crucial work supporting employment and independence for people with a wide range of disabilities.

## **12. Transportation is a vital component and it must be addressed directly:**

One significant reservation that we have regarding many of the state plans that we have reviewed has been the limited attention given to the issue of transportation. This issue is critically important for both people with disabilities and other low-income communities. Many people with disabilities do not drive. Others cannot afford private transportation.

We are pleased to see the issue of transportation discussed as a barrier to employment in your State Plan. For example, we are glad to see transportation is included in the “full array of support services for employment readiness and work activities” that are part of the TANF NEON program on page 29. Further, we are glad to see “Limited access to workforce development services and public transportation in rural Nevada” discussed as an issue by Nevadaworks on page 30. We also appreciate the acknowledgement of the lack of transportation among the “weaknesses of vocational rehabilitation (VR)” discussed on page 31. We encourage your state workforce system to work through these issues in a deliberative, collaborative fashion.

Public transportation is only part of the solution. **In places where it is not possible to coordinate a bus route, states could look at partnering with Uber, Lyft, or other new transportation solutions.** For people with disabilities who do drive, [such companies as Uber and Lyft can also provide a way to enter into the workforce with flexible hours](#). Public sector employers and federal contractors who have Section 503 obligations are key places for apprenticeships and internships and onboarding of talent. It is important for them to play a key role in planning for public transportation as well.

## **13. Aging workers and those with recently acquired disabilities must be specifically addressed:**

**Attention should start BEFORE aging workers and those with recently acquired disabilities lose their job due to aging and/or a newly acquired disability. Many people who have been in the workforce for decades find that before full retirement age they cannot keep up with the physical demands of their jobs. It is vital to start working with them BEFORE they lose their jobs.** In Iowa, IVRS works with a major employer, Unity Point Hospital to “re-home” employees to other jobs within the same company when good workers can no longer do physical jobs and need a new assignment. They find that Emergency Room nurses, for example, come to a point where they can no longer keep up with the physical demands of that job. They have a department that works to “re-home” talented and valued employees who either age into a disability or acquire a disability through accident or illness. Empowering youth with disabilities to enter the workforce should be your highest priority, but keeping aging workers in the workforce until retirement age is also important. This will take a specific strategy and effort so that you don’t have massive numbers of people going onto disability rolls and out of the workplace prematurely.

#### **14. Strategic Engagement to Build a Mentor System for Customers of the Workforce System:**

**Government can't and shouldn't do everything. There is a massive role that can be played by volunteers who are willing to help people with barriers to work, including people with disabilities, find and keep jobs. There is a critical, cooperative role for non-profits and faith-based organizations to play.** Local workforce development areas, for example, could be encouraged to recruit volunteers from local faith communities or local non-profits. However, much more can and should be done to work with parents of teens and young adults with disabilities, and to create volunteer mentorships for people with disabilities who are looking for work or need supports to stay employed and/or grow their careers.

Faith-based organizations and many others can fill massive gaps. [There is a terrific booklet, Clearing Obstacles to Work, put out by the Philanthropy Roundtable that is rich with potential partners and proven programs.](#) This is a huge missed opportunity as you will see in the booklet we just mentioned above. It's all about teaching people to fish (helping them get and keep a job) rather than just giving them fish. It is also important to note in terms of the SNAP and TANF programs that too many faith-based programs focus on giving out food without giving out the volunteer support to help people sustain themselves through gainful employment. [In looking to rethinking policies around SNAP funding, we suggest looking at the innovative efforts of the Seattle Jobs Initiative \(SJI\) to realign that funding into more productive, employment outcomes.](#)

#### **15. The disability issues of people involved in the corrections system must be addressed:**

**There are several points where the current draft of Nevada's Unified State Plan addresses the unique workforce challenges facing ex-offenders as they attempt to reenter society.** For example, page 146 goes into detail about the activities done through "Corrections Education and other Education of Institutionalized Individuals." Further, we are glad to see "Nevada's corrections education teachers and administrators" included in the "WIOA Title II state leadership sub-grant is to continue implementation and sustainability of standards-based education" on page 147. This is important work.

**However, the lens of disability needs to be applied to the work being done with this population, whether through corrections education or reintegration support.** [According to recently published data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, "An estimated 32% of prisoners and 40% of jail inmates reported having at least one disability."](#) This issue is a serious one and it needs to be addressed at the state level. Frequently people are involved in the criminal justice system because they have disability issues, including learning differences, ADHD, executive function, and mental health issues that went undiagnosed and/or unaddressed through childhood and into the school years.

**Given these statistics from the BJS, it is vital that states identify how many of the individuals in the corrections system and in the ex-offender pipeline have disabilities.** There are two related challenges here. First, there is a need to identify potential disability issues among inmates during the intake process and ensure their needs can be met. Ideally, this type of assessment could be done within the first thirty days of their sentence. Such identification could then feed into the work being done through educational programs in corrections. Second, are the issues related to preparing inmates for their release and reintegration into society. Whether it is mental health supports or learning accommodations helping ex-offenders to find employ when they are home is a critical workforce development challenge. It is a challenge that only grows more complicated when a disability remain unaddressed. The price paid for ignoring these issue



are higher rates of recidivism and greater costs to society. Addressing these issues at the beginning and at the end of the corrections process will have downstream effects and hopefully will enable states to address the intersectionality of these workforce, disability, and justice issues..

**Conclusion:**

In all of our work around WIOA, we have emphasized the fact that this new law represents the intersection of hope and history for people with disabilities. Nevada's Unified State Plan is a great example of that hard work, dedicated effort, and specific policies needed to realize those hopes. People with disabilities want to pursue the American Dream, just like everyone. Making sure there are pathways for their talents to meet employer talent needs is a win-win-win for people, taxpayers, and businesses alike. We are encouraged by what we have seen from Nevada and we stand ready to assist in any way that we can.

Below are two data tables that provide detailed information ranking the states in terms of employment rates for people with disabilities as well as the employment gap between people with and without disabilities. This has been added to show you where each state ranks nationally.

**APPENDIX – Ranking 50 States by Employment Rates and Employment Gap**

Data Source- Chart 1: Table 2.1: Employment—Civilians with Disabilities Ages 18 to 64 Years Living in the Community for the United States and States: 2014 from the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium

**Disability Employment Rate by State, 2014**

	State	%	Rank	State	%	Rank	State	%	Rank	State	%	Rank	State	%	Rank	
1	South Dakota	50.1	12	Montana	40.5	23	Oklahoma	36.4	34	California	33.3	45	Arkansas	29.2		
2	North Dakota	49.9	13	Connecticut	40.2	24	Oregon	36.4	35	Arizona	32.8	46	South Carolina	29.0		
3	Iowa	46.5	14	New Hampshire	40.0	25	Indiana	36.2	36	Missouri	32.8	47	Mississippi	27.4		
4	Nebraska	46.0	15	Kansas	39.8	26	Vermont	36.2	37	Maine	32.5	48	Kentucky	27.3		
5	Wyoming	45.2	16	Wisconsin	39.8	27	Illinois	35.7	38	Louisiana	32.1	49	Alabama	27.2		
6	Minnesota	44.4	17	New Jersey	39.2	28	Delaware	35.6	39	North Carolina	31.3	50	West Virginia	25.6		
7	Utah	44.0	18	Maryland	39.1	29	Massachusetts	35.5	40	New Mexico	30.4		Washington D.C.	30.3		
8	Hawaii	42.4	19	Idaho	38.8	30	Ohio	34.6	41	Florida	30.1					
9	Colorado	41.6	20	Texas	38.0	31	Pennsylvania	34.5	42	Tennessee	29.9				Source: <a href="#">Annual Disability Statistics Compendium</a>	
10	Nevada	40.9	21	Washington	37.7	32	Rhode Island	33.9	43	Georgia	29.6					
11	Alaska	40.8	22	Virginia	37.6	33	New York	33.6	44	Michigan	29.6				United States	34.4

Data Source-Chart 2: Table 2.9: Employment Gap—Civilians Ages 18 to 64 Years Living in the Community for the United States and States, by Disability Status: 2014 Disability Statistics Compendium

**The Difference in the Employment Gap Between Disabled and Non Disabled Adults 2014**

	State	Gap	Rank	State	Gap	Rank	State	Gap	Rank	State	Gap	Rank	State	Gap	Rank	
50	Maine	47.4	39	Mass.	43.5	28	Delaware	40.7	17	Minnesota	38.5	6	Alaska	35.3		
49	Kentucky	47.1	38	Georgia	43.5	27	New York	40.4	16	Washington	38.3	5	Hawaii	34.2		
48	South Carolina	45	37	Florida	43.3	26	Louisiana	40.3	15	Nebraska	37.9	4	South Dakota	33.6		
47	Michigan	45	36	Mississippi	43.1	25	Virginia	40	14	Connecticut	37.7	3	Utah	33.5		
46	West Virginia	44.9	35	N. Carolina	43	24	Illinois	40	13	Colorado	37.4	2	Nevada	33.4		
45	Arkansas	44.6	34	Ohio	42.5	23	Kansas	39.9	12	Texas	37.3	1	North Dakota	32.1		
44	Tennessee	44.5	33	Pennsylvania	42	22	Arizona	39.7	11	New Jersey	37.3		Washington DC	45.2		
43	Missouri	44.4	32	Wisconsin	41.4	21	Oklahoma	39.2	10	Montana	37.3					
42	Vermont	44.2	31	New Hampshire	41.3	20	Maryland	39.1	9	Idaho	37				Source: <a href="#">Annual Disability Statistics Compendium</a>	
41	Alabama	44.1	30	New Mexico	40.8	19	California	38.9	8	Wyoming	35.9					
40	Rhode Island	43.8	29	Indiana	40.7	18	Oregon	38.5	7	Iowa	35.7				USA	40.3