



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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Disability Community Thanks Governor, Legislature for Focus on Equipping People with Disabilities for Employment

(MADISON) – The Survival Coalition of more than 30 disability organizations thanks Governor Walker for today’s signing of the special session bill that will boost employment rates for Wisconsinites with disabilities. The bill is part of the Governor’s Better Bottom Line initiative announced in January.

While the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics puts employment participation rates at 68% for the general population, the rate is only 19.1% for people with disabilities. The national unemployment rate for people with disabilities is still more than double that of the general population.

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t06.htm>

“Statewide, we hear that access to a meaningful job is among the highest priorities for people living with disabilities,” said Maureen Ryan, Survival Coalition co-chair. “A productive job at fair wages is positively linked to better health, reduced poverty, and overall decreased reliance on public supports and programs.”

The special session bill the Governor is signing today provides more than \$1 million in training and preparation grants directly to businesses that want to hire and train people with disabilities. It also provides \$750,000 to expand Project Search, a youth employment initiative, from 7 to 20 sites. This innovative high school transition program provides a year of intensive on-the-job training in health care and other fields to students with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

“We have worked closely with the Department of Workforce Development to ensure that the grants would be awarded to public and private entities committed to hiring people with disabilities into jobs in the community at competitive wages,” said Beth Swedeen, Survival co-chair.

“These grants clearly define an expectation that funds will result in an actual increase in jobs for people with disabilities within a specific business or company. This is a critical component of any disability-related training program.”

“Survival Coalition is very supportive of the Governor’s *A Better Bottom Line* initiative, and sees this new law as a great step toward how we can work together to continue to improve employment rates for people with disabilities,” said Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival co-chair.

This new law also builds upon the Legislature’s \$4 million investment late last year in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) program to expand specialized supports to people with disabilities looking for employment. This investment pulls down an additional \$14 million in federal match. The DVR program has a proven track record of a 210% return on investment for public dollars spent.

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