### Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 11, 2025

The Honorable Lori Chavez-DeRemer Secretary Department of Labor 200 Constitution Avenue NW Washington, DC 20210

#### Dear Secretary Chavez-DeRemer:

Since your tenure as the U.S. Secretary of Labor began on March 11, 2025, you have dismantled key disability employment protections and the offices responsible for enforcing these protections—amounting to what appears to be a coordinated assault on critical employment protections for workers with disabilities<sup>1</sup> that undermines decades of progress towards economic self-sufficiency.

While in office, you have proposed to roll back *Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (Section 503) regulations (which prohibits discrimination by federal contractors), proposed defunding and cut key staff from the Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), proposed additional cuts to the Office of Disability Employment (ODEP), and withdrew a proposed rule that would have finally ensured competitive wages for disabled workers.

One in four American adults live with a disability.<sup>2</sup> This includes people with physical conditions, and those with mental health conditions, autoimmune disorders, and episodic conditions that may not be visible but still significantly impact daily functioning.<sup>3</sup> In June, you stated, "[c]elebrating America means celebrating the value and talent that all Americans—including people with disabilities—add to our nation's workplaces and communities," promising that "the Department of Labor remains committed to ensuring all people have the opportunity to find meaningful work." Your recent actions, however, suggest otherwise. We write to seek an explanation for these threats to Americans with disabilities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This letter uses both person-first and identity-first language interchangeably due to evolutions in the disability community.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control, Disability and Health, "Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic," April 14, 2025, <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.html">https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.html</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> ADA National Network, "How is Disability Defined in the Americans With Disabilities Act?," 2023, <a href="https://adata.org/factsheet/ada-definitions">https://adata.org/factsheet/ada-definitions</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "US Department of Labor announces 'Celebrating Value and Talent' as National Disability Employment Awareness Month's 2025 theme," press release, June 26, 2025, <a href="https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/odep/odep20250626">https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/odep/odep20250626</a>.

#### Section 503 Implementation Rollbacks and Cuts to the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs

Section 503 prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities and directs contractors to work to employ a workforce where at least seven percent is made up of people with disabilities.<sup>5</sup> This provision serves as a cornerstone of federal efforts to promote disability employment in the private sector. As a result, federal contractors have implemented recruitment and hiring policies and practices that support people with disabilities in the workforce.<sup>6</sup>

On July 1, 2025, you proposed a rule that would eliminate both Section 503's hiring goal for federal contractors and its data collection requirement to monitor compliance with disability employment objectives.<sup>7</sup> Despite the law's successes, these directives are critically important to retain progress. In 2024, only 22.5 percent of people with disabilities were employed, compared to 65.8 percent of people without disabilities, and the unemployment rate for disabled people was about double the rate of those without disabilities.<sup>8</sup> Without concerted action, a growing number of disabled people would be shut out of the workforce and increasingly reliant on social safety net programs—at the same time that the Trump administration has cut hundreds of billions of dollars from these programs, which will result in millions of Americans losing health insurance, food assistance, and other benefits.<sup>9</sup>

This rule would "limit disabled people's ability to gain competitive integrated employment" because people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers in both entering and remaining in the workforce. Without systemic data collection and measurable targets, there would be no accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance with the law. This policy reversal appears to be fundamentally inconsistent with the Trump Administration's stated goals of reducing government dependency and promoting workforce participation. <sup>11</sup> Many individuals with disabilities want to work and possess valuable skills but require reasonable accommodations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Employment Protections Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: 50 Years of Protecting Americans with Disabilities in the Workplace," <a href="https://www.eeoc.gov/employment-protections-under-rehabilitation-act-1973-50-years-protecting-americans-disabilities">https://www.eeoc.gov/employment-protections-under-rehabilitation-act-1973-50-years-protecting-americans-disabilities</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Westat, "Implementation of Disability-Inclusive Workplace Policies and Practices by Federal Contractors and Non-Federal Contractors," Joseph Gasper, Benjamin Muz, and Martha Palan, April 2020, p. 2, <a href="https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/58088">https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/58088</a> DOL PolicyBrief %231 07-for508.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Register Notice, "Modifications to the Regulations Implementing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended," July 1, 2025,

 $<sup>\</sup>frac{https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/01/2025-12233/modifications-to-the-regulations-implementing-section-503-of-the-rehabilitation-act-of-1973-as.}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary," February 25, 2025, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Congressional Budget Office, "Estimated Budgetary Effects of Public Law 119-21, to Provide for Reconciliation Pursuant to Title II of H. Con. Res. 14, Relative to CBO's January 2025 Baseline," July 21, 2025, <a href="https://www.cbo.gov/publication/61570">https://www.cbo.gov/publication/61570</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Center for American Progress, "The Trump Administration's War on Disability," Mia Ives-Rublee and Casey Doherty, July 28, 2025, <a href="https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-trump-administrations-war-on-disability/">https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-trump-administrations-war-on-disability/</a>. <sup>11</sup> New York Times, "Trump Leadership: If You Want Welfare and Can Work, You Must," Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Mehmet Oz, Brooke Rollins, and Scott Turner, May 14, 2025, <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/14/opinion/trump-welfare-medicaid-requirements.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/14/opinion/trump-welfare-medicaid-requirements.html</a>.

and supportive hiring practices to get and keep jobs. <sup>12</sup> Eliminating the regulatory framework that encourages such practices would likely reduce employment opportunities for disabled workers, increasing their reliance on government benefits. <sup>13</sup>

You have further weakened protections for individuals with disabilities through layoffs at OFCCP, which serves as the primary enforcement office for Section 503. <sup>14</sup> In FY 2023, OFCCP recovered \$6.5 million for 1,845 victims of discrimination and negotiated 260 job opportunities. <sup>15</sup> In March 2025, DOL laid off nearly 90 percent of OFCCP staff, leaving only 50 employees to process thousands of federal contractor audits that affect millions of workers. <sup>16</sup> Even worse, the President's FY26 budget proposes to eliminate OFCCP entirely. <sup>17</sup>

As one former OFCCP employee stated, these cuts would effectively dismantle the office, "mak[ing] it easier for federal contractors to discriminate against their employees" by removing the federal government's primary tool for holding contractors accountable.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Proposed Office of Disability Employment Policy Funding Cuts**

ODEP, which develops and provides technical assistance on how to implement policies that increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, faces devastating budget cuts under your leadership. The President's proposed FY26 budget cuts ODEP funding from \$43 million to \$33.8 million, a 21 percent reduction.<sup>19</sup>

ODEP serves as a vital coordinating hub across federal agencies and provides important services, including the Job Accommodation Network, which offers free guidance on workplace accommodations and *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) compliance to employers.<sup>20</sup>

https://www.americanprogress.org/article/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-market/.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Forbes, "Why Is The Employment Gap For People With Disabilities So Consistently Wide?," Andrew Pulrang, October 31, 2022, <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2022/10/31/why-is-the-employment-gap-for-people-with-disabilities-so-consistently-wide/?sh=755d274e276b">https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2022/10/31/why-is-the-employment-gap-for-people-with-disabilities-so-consistently-wide/?sh=755d274e276b</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Center for American Progress, "Removing Obstacles for Disabled Workers Would Strengthen the U.S. Labor Market," Mia Ives-Rublee, Rose Khattar, and Lily Roberts, May 24, 2022, <a href="https://www.americanprogress.org/article/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-obstacles-for-disabled-workers-would-strengthen-the-u-s-labor-particle/removing-particle/removi

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Employment Protections Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: 50 Years of Protecting Americans with Disabilities in the Workplace," <a href="https://www.eeoc.gov/employment-protections-under-rehabilitation-act-1973-50-years-protecting-americans-disabilities">https://www.eeoc.gov/employment-protections-under-rehabilitation-act-1973-50-years-protecting-americans-disabilities</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "FY 2025 Congressional Budget Justification: Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs," p. 26, <a href="https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2025/CBJ-2025-V2-10.pdf">https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2025/CBJ-2025-V2-10.pdf</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Federal News Network, "Office of Federal Contract Compliance programs lays off 90% of workforce," Michele Sandiford, May 13, 2025, <a href="https://federalnewsnetwork.com/federal-newscast/2025/05/office-of-federal-contract-compliance-programs-lays-off-90-percent-of-workforce/">https://federalnewsnetwork.com/federal-newscast/2025/05/office-of-federal-contract-compliance-programs-lays-off-90-percent-of-workforce/</a>; Bloomberg Law, "Disability Bias Audits in Limbo as Trump Seeks DOL Office's End," Rebecca Klar, June 4, 2025,

https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/disability-bias-audits-in-limbo-as-trump-seeks-dol-offices-end. 

17 U.S. Department of Labor, "FY 2026 Congressional Budget Justification: Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs," p.2, https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2026/CBJ-2026-V2-10.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Federal News Network, "Labor Dept seeks 90% staffing cut from federal contractor watchdog," Jory Heckman, March 5, 2025, <a href="https://federalnewsnetwork.com/agency-oversight/2025/03/labor-dept-seeks-90-staffing-cut-from-federal-contractor-watchdog/">https://federalnewsnetwork.com/agency-oversight/2025/03/labor-dept-seeks-90-staffing-cut-from-federal-contractor-watchdog/</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "FY 2026 Congressional Budget Justification: Office of Disability Employment Policy," p.2, <a href="https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2026/CBJ-2026-V3-03.pdf">https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2026/CBJ-2026-V3-03.pdf</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Job Accommodation Network, "About JAN," <a href="https://askjan.org/about-us">https://askjan.org/about-us</a>.

ODEP's work demonstrated that nearly half of workplace accommodations cost nothing and those requiring expense have a median cost of only \$300.<sup>21</sup> ODEP created the first regular national tracking system for disability employment statistics,<sup>22</sup> expanded the workforce development system,<sup>23</sup> and launched the Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship to support more accessible apprenticeship opportunities.<sup>24</sup> By cutting this office's funding, your administration is decreasing the federal government's leadership role in promoting competitive integrated employment at a time when such coordination is most needed.

#### Withdrawals of Protection for Workers with Disabilities Earning the Subminimum Wage

Under your leadership, DOL is withdrawing its support of paying workers competitive wages. Subminimum wage was first established in Section 14(c) of the *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938* (FLSA), which authorized employers to pay a wage lower than the federal minimum wage to individuals "whose earning capacity is impaired by age or physical or mental deficiency or injury" upon receiving a certificate from DOL's Wage and Hour Division (WHD). The legislation's goal was to create employment opportunities for disabled people at a time when many were institutionalized or were disabled veterans. However, after the passage of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Rehabilitation Act*, and ADA, people with disabilities received more inclusive education and workforce training that prompted their readiness to successfully participant in the workforce. Yet, over 40,000 Americans with disabilities are presently working with employers that have obtained subminimum wage certificates.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Job Accommodation Network, "Low Cost, High Impact," updated September 17, 2025, <a href="https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm">https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "Disability Employment Statistics," <a href="https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/research-evaluation/statistics">https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/research-evaluation/statistics</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "Disability Employment Initiative," <a href="https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/disability-employment-initiative">https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/disability-employment-initiative</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Urban Institute, "Inclusive Apprenticeship: A Summary of What We Know About Apprentices with Disabilities," Daniel Kuehn, John Marotta, Bhavani Arabandi, and Batia Katz, May 20, 2021, <a href="https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104249/inclusive-apprenticeship-a-summary-of-what-we-know-about-apprentices-with-disabilities.pdf">https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104249/inclusive-apprenticeship-a-summary-of-what-we-know-about-apprentices-with-disabilities.pdf</a>.

New America, "Pennies on the Dollar: The Use of Subminimum Wage for Disabled Workers Across the United States," Lillie Heigl, Kimberly Knackstedt, and Elena Silva, February 14, 2024, https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "Fact Sheet #39: The Employment of Workers with Disabilities at Subminimum Wages," July 2008, <a href="https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/39-14c-subminimum-wage">https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/39-14c-subminimum-wage</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> New America, "Pennies on the Dollar: The Use of Subminimum Wage for Disabled Workers Across the United States," Lillie Heigl, Kimberly Knackstedt, and Elena Silva, February 14, 2024, <a href="https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/the-use-of-subminimum-wage-for-disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/">https://disabled-workers-across-policy/reports/</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> The Nation's Health, "Law allowing people with disabilities to be underpaid faces new scrutiny," Teddi Nicolaus, July 2024, <a href="https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/54/5/1.1">https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/54/5/1.1</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Register Notice, "Employment of Workers With Disabilities Under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act; Withdrawal," July 7, 2025, <a href="https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/07/2025-12534/employment-of-workers-with-disabilities-under-section-14c-of-the-fair-labor-standards-act-withdrawal.">https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/07/2025-12534/employment-of-workers-with-disabilities-under-section-14c-of-the-fair-labor-standards-act-withdrawal.</a>

On December 4, 2024, DOL under President Biden proposed phasing out these certificates,<sup>31</sup> finding that the ADA created new protections that rendered the certificates unnecessary and drawing inspiration from the 15 states that had successfully eliminated such programs.<sup>32</sup> However, on July 7, 2025, you reversed this decision,<sup>33</sup> and your department's WHD continues to issue 14(c) certificates, which enable employers to pay workers with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour,<sup>34</sup> with workers making on average less than \$3.50 per hour.<sup>35</sup> This exploitative practice undermines the dignity and economic security of people with disabilities while creating perverse incentives for employers to segregate disabled workers in sheltered workshops, where most employees are people with disabilities.<sup>36</sup> Maria Town, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), stated, "Disabled people are better positioned to reach our highest potential when we are granted the opportunity to compete for employment and given the fair wages, accommodations, and support services we need. The Department of Labor's new regulatory proposals make it far harder for disabled workers in the United States to access those very equal employment opportunity tools."<sup>37</sup>

#### Undermining Apprenticeship and Job Corps Pipelines for Young, Disabled Workers

Registered apprenticeships are training programs that combine paid job training with technical instruction, providing clear pathways to employment.<sup>38</sup> According to the Urban Institute, workers who completed apprenticeships saw a 49 percent increase in their earnings.<sup>39</sup> DOL has

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Register Notice, "Employment of Workers With Disabilities Under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act," December 4, 2024, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/12/04/2024-27880/employment-of-workers-with-disabilities-

https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/12/04/2024-27880/employment-of-workers-with-disabilities under-section-14c-of-the-fair-labor-standards-act.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Register Notice, "Employment of Workers With Disabilities Under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act," December 4, 2024, https://www.federal.gov/december/2024/12/04/2024, 27880/cmployment of workers with disabilities.

 $<sup>\</sup>frac{https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/12/04/2024-27880/employment-of-workers-with-disabilities-under-section-14c-of-the-fair-labor-standards-act.}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Register Notice, "Employment of Workers With Disabilities Under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act; Withdrawal," July 7, 2025,

 $<sup>\</sup>frac{https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/07/2025-12534/employment-of-workers-with-disabilities-under-section-14c-of-the-fair-labor-standards-act-withdrawal.}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> The National Law Review, "DOL Proposes Rule to Phase Out Subminimum Wages for Workers with Disabilities," Jennifer Faroldi Kogos, December 10, 2024, <a href="https://natlawreview.com/article/dol-proposes-rule-phase-out-subminimum-wages-workers-disabilities">https://natlawreview.com/article/dol-proposes-rule-phase-out-subminimum-wages-workers-disabilities</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Subminimum Wage Program: DOL Could Do More to Ensure Timely Oversight," January 2023, p. 16, <a href="https://www.gao.gov/assets/820/817181.pdf?itid=lk\_inline\_enhanced-template">https://www.gao.gov/assets/820/817181.pdf?itid=lk\_inline\_enhanced-template</a>. <sup>36</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Some States are Eliminating Subminimum Wages for People with Disabilities – What Does That Mean for Workers?," Elizabeth Curda, May 1, 2025,

https://www.gao.gov/blog/some-states-are-eliminating-subminimum-wages-people-disabilities-what-does-mean-workers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> American Association of People with Disabilities, "American Association of People with Disabilities Denounces Proposed Department of Labor Actions Hindering Disability Employment," press release, Jess Davidson, July 10, 2025, <a href="https://www.aapd.com/dol-harmful-employment-actions/">https://www.aapd.com/dol-harmful-employment-actions/</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Urban Institute, "What Are Registered Apprenticeship Programs?," May 22, 2023,

https://www.urban.org/apps/national-occupational-frameworks/what-are-registered-apprenticeship-programs.

39 Urban Institute, "Registered Apprenticeships Can Increase Earnings, but Not Enough People Know That," Karen Gardiner, November 15, 2023, <a href="https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/registered-apprenticeships-can-increase-earnings-not-enough-people-know">https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/registered-apprenticeships-can-increase-earnings-not-enough-people-know</a>.

recognized apprenticeships through a registration process that historically includes components to ensure equal opportunity: sponsors with more than five apprentices must develop and maintain a program that includes hiring goals for individuals with disabilities.<sup>40</sup>

But on July 2, 2025, your department issued a proposed rule to eliminate these equal opportunity regulations. <sup>41</sup> These regulations are critical to career development. <sup>42</sup> However, despite growth in apprenticeships, people with disabilities remain severely under-represented: only about 1.2 percent of apprentices self-identify as having a disability, far below the previous administration's aspiration goal of seven percent. <sup>43</sup>

Your department has also ordered the suspension<sup>44</sup> of Job Corps operations, a free education and job training program for young adults between the ages of 16 and 24.<sup>45</sup> These actions remove critical opportunities that help ensure young people with disabilities can access valuable training opportunities and contribute to the workforce, and 26 percent of participants in the program identified as disabled.<sup>46</sup> A Job Corps report indicates that participants with disabilities have equal or higher success rates on career technical trade completion, literacy gains, and numeracy gains than their non-disabled peers.<sup>47</sup> More than half of the participants with disabilities complete their Career Technical Training (CTT) or receive a GED.<sup>48</sup>

#### **Conclusion and Questions**

The disability community deserves leadership that expands employment opportunities. But your actions as Secretary of Labor represent the most significant retreat from opportunities for workers with disabilities and federal disability rights enforcement in decades.<sup>49</sup> When the nation should have celebrated landmark civil rights achievements that furthered the independence, dignity, and productivity of people with disabilities during National Disability Employment

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> 29 CFR § 30.4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Register Notice, "Prohibiting Illegal Discrimination in Registered Apprenticeship Programs," July 2, 2025,

https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/02/2025-12317/prohibiting-illegal-discrimination-in-registered-apprenticeship-programs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> American Association of People with Disabilities, "American Association of People with Disabilities Denounces Proposed Department of Labor Actions Hindering Disability Employment," press release, Jess Davidson, July 10, 2025, <a href="https://www.aapd.com/dol-harmful-employment-actions/">https://www.aapd.com/dol-harmful-employment-actions/</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Disability Inclusive Employment, "Disability Inclusion in Registered Apprenticeship Programs," Nanette Goodman, Nick Canfield, and Michael Morris, May 2024,

https://disabilityinclusiveemployment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2024-goodman-apprenticeship.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> The Hill, "Labor Department suspends Job Corps centers operations, drawing bipartisan pushback," Aris Folley, May 30, 2025, <a href="https://thehill.com/business/budget/5325826-labor-department-job-corps-centers/">https://thehill.com/business/budget/5325826-labor-department-job-corps-centers/</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Job Corps, <a href="https://www.jobcorps.gov">https://www.jobcorps.gov</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Job Corps, "Strategies, Supports and Tips for Working with Students with Disabilities," <a href="https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/SupportingStudentsLD/Pages/Strategies,-Supports--Tips-for-Working-with-Students-with-Disabilities.aspx">https://supports-gov/SupportingStudentsLD/Pages/Strategies,-Supports--Tips-for-Working-with-Students-with-Disabilities.aspx</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Job Corps, "Job Corps Disability Program Report: Program Year 2016," November 2017, p. 7, <a href="https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/Information%20Notices/in\_17\_20a.pdf">https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/Information%20Notices/in\_17\_20a.pdf</a>.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> NPR, "With disability rights under attack, history offers hope and a possible playbook," Dan Gorenstein and Leslie Walker, May 5, 2025, <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/05/05/nx-s1-5384240/with-disability-rights-under-attack-history-offers-hope-and-a-possible-playbook">https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/05/05/nx-s1-5384240/with-disability-rights-under-attack-history-offers-hope-and-a-possible-playbook</a>.

Awareness month,<sup>50</sup> you have instead continued a systematic dismantling of decades of bipartisan progress that has measurably improved employment opportunities and quality of life for millions of Americans with disabilities.

We write with questions about the rationale for these harmful policies and your plans to restore protections for Americans with disabilities. In order to inform our legislative responsibilities with regard to the nation's labor, disability, and civil rights laws, and the operations of DOL, we ask that you provide answers by December 11, 2025.

# Questions on Section 503 Implementation Rollbacks and Cuts to the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs

- 1. What economic impact analysis was conducted regarding the elimination of disability employment goals for federal contractors, particularly how many people with disabilities may lose their jobs and end up relying on safety net systems?
- 2. How many compliance investigations were done in FY 2024, and how many does the Department intend to conduct in FY 2025 and FY 2026?
- 3. What analysis demonstrates that closing 51 of 55 OFCCP offices and laying off 90 percent of the OFCCP workforce will not impair disability discrimination enforcement?<sup>51</sup>
- 4. Please provide the Department's data on Section 503 compliance rates and disability employment outcomes among federal contractors, and how the proposed rule would affect the Department's ability to track progress toward disability employment goals.

#### Questions on Proposed Office of Disability Employment Policy Funding Cuts

- 1. How will proposed ODEP budget reductions impact ongoing initiatives like the Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship and technical assistance to employers seeking to hire workers with disabilities?
- 2. What analysis has the Department conducted on how ODEP cuts will affect the agency's ability to provide guidance to state workforce systems serving the approximately 20 million working-age Americans with disabilities?<sup>52</sup>
- 3. What is the Department's plan for collecting data on disability employment when ODEP resources are cut, particularly given the persistent employment gap between people with and without disabilities?
- 4. How does the Department plan to fulfill its obligation under the *Workforce Innovation* and *Opportunity Act* to serve individuals with disabilities if ODEP is no longer able to serve as the federal government's leader and coordinator on disability employment policy?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), <a href="https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam">https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Bloomberg Law, "DOL Contractor Watchdog Plans to Cut Staff by 90%, Memo Says," Rebecca Klar, February 27, 2025, <a href="https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/dol-contractor-watchdog-directed-to-cut-staff-by-90-memo-says">https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/dol-contractor-watchdog-directed-to-cut-staff-by-90-memo-says</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> American Institutes for Research, "A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults With Disabilities," Michelle Yin, Dahlia Shaewitz, Cynthia Overton, and Deeza-Mae Smith, April 2018, <a href="https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Hidden-Market-Spending-Power-of-People-with-Disabilities-April-2018.pdf">https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Hidden-Market-Spending-Power-of-People-with-Disabilities-April-2018.pdf</a>.

## Questions on Withdrawals of Protection for Workers with Disabilities Earning the Subminimum Wage

- 1. What new legal analysis led the Department to conclude it lacks authority to phase out Section 14(c) certificates?
- 2. How does the Department justify maintaining subminimum wage provisions when multiple states have successfully eliminated these practices and research shows that workers with disabilities can achieve competitive integrated employment when provided appropriate supports?
- 3. What alternative mechanisms will the Department implement, if any, to protect low-wage workers with disabilities?

### Questions on Undermining Apprenticeship and Job Corps Pipelines for Young, Disabled Workers

- 1. How does eliminating the Job Corps align with the ADA, which aims to ensure equal opportunity for people with disabilities in all aspects of life, including employment?
- 2. What alternative programs will serve young people with disabilities previously served by Job Corps and registered apprenticeships?
- 3. How does the Department plan to maintain progress on disability employment pipelines if both ODEP resources and apprenticeship funding are reduced?
- 4. What analysis has the Department conducted on the cumulative impact of cuts to Job Corps, apprenticeship programs, and ODEP on overall employment outcomes for people with disabilities?

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Warren

**United States Senator** 

Debbie Dingell

Member of Congress

Tammy Duckworth United States Senator

Tammy Virekwath

Lateefah Simon

Member of Congress

Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Gran S. Preso

Dan Goldman Member of Congress

Yassamin Ansari Member of Congress

Member of Congress (OH-03)

Alexandria Ocasia Cortez

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Member of Congress

Veronica Escobar Member of Congress

LaMonica McIver Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal Member of Congress

Steny H. Hover Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Raxheda flail

Rashida Tlaib Member of Congress

Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress

Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman Member of Congress

Andre Carson
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

SETH MOULTON Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr. Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen United States Senator

Emily Randall
Member of Congress

Dina Titus

Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi Member of Congress

Adam Smith

Member of Congress

Nikki Budzinski

Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky Member of Congress

Angie Craig
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D. Member of Congress

James P. McGovern Member of Congress Gwen S. Moore Member of Congress

Brendan F. Boyle Member of Congress

Judy Chu Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin Member of Congress

Robin L. Kelly Member of Congress

Sarah McBride Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Shri Thanedar Member of Congress

Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress

Delia C. Ramirez

Member of Congress

Ro Khanna Member of Congress

Terrold Nadler
Member of Congress

John W. Mannion Member of Congress

William R. Keating Member of Congress En Swedwell

Eric Swalwell Member of Congress

Kelly Modison Member of Congress

Ji Tokuda
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Chell R

Member of Congress

Julie Johnson Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Kirsten Gillibrand

United States Senator

Greg Landsman Member of Congress