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To: Chairwoman Jimenez and Members of the Assembly Human Services Committee

From: Ray Cantor, NJBIA Deputy Chief Government Affairs Officer and Alexis Bailey, NJBIA Vice President of Government Affairs

Date: October 14, 2022

RE: Employing Individuals with Disabilities:

*The committee will receive testimony from invited guests concerning employment for individuals with disabilities, including current initiatives available to individuals with disabilities seeking employment and possibilities for improvement of these initiatives.*

On behalf of NJBIA, the largest and most influential business association in New Jersey, we appreciate Chairwoman Jimenez inviting us to testify on employing individuals with disabilities and how we can improve initiatives in this space moving forward.

### **Current Status of People with Disabilities in the Workforce**

According to the CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, 1.4 million or approximately 21% of adults in New Jersey have some form of disability. According to the most recent available data, the employment rate of working-age adults with disabilities in New Jersey was only 37.7%. While many individuals with disabilities have unique skills and the desire to work, they face challenges navigating the job market.

Facilitating the entry of people with disabilities into the workforce is key to growing the economy, especially in light of the fact that people with disabilities and their dependents account for 13.8% of all Social Security beneficiaries. Increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities helps them better provide for themselves and their families, while simultaneously empowering them to be more independent.

Moreover, employing disabled individuals benefits employers as well. Hiring individuals with disabilities increases an organization's diversity and introduces employees with different perspectives and skills into the workforce. Employees with disabilities have high retention rates – 85%, according to the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities. Similarly, Marriott has previously found that the turnover rate for employees hired through a program for people with special needs was just 6%, while overall company turnover was 52%.

## **Challenges Facing the Disability Community**

Many factors can make it challenging for people with disabilities to obtain gainful employment. Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions about people with disabilities. Unconscious bias presents a challenge that all New Jerseyans must actively work toward addressing to promote inclusive spaces for people with disabilities. Additionally, access to transportation in various parts of the state creates added barriers to employment for many people in New Jersey, including the disability community. Lastly, although schools are mandated to provide transitional services to students with disabilities in order to prepare them for adulthood, not every school administers these services effectively. The Legislature can proactively work with the Department of Education to ensure that transition services are being adequately administered to those who are entitled to them in our schools to ensure students are as prepared as possible to enter the workforce in whatever capacity is accessible to them.

## **Resources Available to Support Workforce Participation**

There are many public and private initiatives and resources available to help people with disabilities find employment. Businesses looking to hire and train individuals with disabilities can partner with local community-based organizations such as the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities, Easterseals New Jersey, the New Jersey Association of Community Providers, Spectrum Works or The Arc of New Jersey for resources and assistance. These groups can help connect employers to talented potential employees and even provide job coaches to accompany individuals with disabilities on the job to assist with training and on-boarding.

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development also has several resources that can be useful for employers. DOL's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is an excellent place for employers to start the search for qualified individuals with disabilities that can join their companies. They can also provide information on hiring and training incentives available and provide guidance on accommodations. DOL's Office of Apprenticeships also has several grants for a wide range of apprenticeship programs that employers can use to train and hire new employees, including those with disabilities.

Raising awareness about these resources and continuing to make them available to as many people as possible is critically important to remove any barriers that disabled jobseekers may face.

## **Ways Employers Can Foster Inclusive Hiring Practices**

In addition to working with community and state-based partners, there are many simple steps employers can take to adopt more inclusive hiring practices and provide workplace accommodations. For example, indicating on job postings that individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply and advertising jobs on multiple mediums utilizing accessible messaging with large text, graphics and audio increases the reach of hiring efforts.

In the workplace, providing onboarding and training for new employees, educating staff on disabilities, and facilitating accommodations such as work-from-home and service animals where applicable can make the environment more accessible. Other workplace adjustments may include utilizing assistive technology and improving workspaces to provide accessible desks, walkways

and other facilities. Though there may be some costs for such accommodations, there are state and federal tax credits that employers may qualify for to offset the expense of adaptive equipment and workplace modifications.

### **Legislative Solutions for Improving Workforce Participation**

Under the leadership of former Senate President Sweeney, New Jersey took several steps to encourage and support employment opportunities for individuals. We are pleased to see these efforts continue through the bipartisan, bicameral Disability Caucus under the leadership of Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz, Assembly Majority Leader Lou Greenwald, Senator Anthony Bucco and Assemblywoman Aura Dunn. Although our state has made great strides in supporting the disability community, the Legislature can continue to aid in this effort and enhance workforce participation by advancing the following legislation:

- **A-479** (Murphy/Moen) – Allows corporation business tax and gross income tax credits to businesses employing certain persons with developmental disabilities
- **A-681** (Verrelli/Benson/Mukherji) – Allows credit against corporation business tax and gross income tax liability for employing persons with a developmental disability; *or* **A-904** (Peterson/Wimberly) – Provides employers with various tax incentives for hiring persons with disabilities under insurance premiums tax, corporation business tax and gross income tax
- **A-787** (Simonsen/McClellan) – Directs Secretary of Higher Education to develop career and education guide for postsecondary students with disabilities
- **A-1112** (Chaparro/Benson/Haider) – Requires DHS and other appropriate state agencies to disseminate information on transportation options for persons with developmental disabilities
- **A-1313** (Greenwald/Benson/McKnight) – Establishes program in NJDOLWD to connect persons with disabilities with job training and employment
- **A-1693** (Quijano/Giblin/Chaparro) – Creates résumé bank for certain persons with disabilities
- **A-2242** (Lopez/Benson/Jaffer) – Requires DOT, NJT, and DHS to study and implement transportation mobility and accessibility improvements for persons with autism and developmental disabilities
- **A-3779** (Reynolds-Jackson/Verrelli/Wimberly) – Requires Office of Information Technology to establish centralized, one-stop website resource guide to assist persons in navigating the State’s developmental disability service system

### **Conclusion**

Overall, it is imperative for the business community, the Legislature and disability partners to work together to dispel myths and break any stigma associated with hiring people with disabilities. Additionally, we can all work together to raise awareness about the many resources available throughout the state and continue to forge partnerships with those in the disability community. NJBIA is proud to continue to partner with community-based organizations to host webinars and

share information explaining the various resources available to the business community and promote inclusive hiring practices. Our previous webinars on this critical topic can be found here:

- **August 18, 2022 – Hiring People with Disabilities: On-The-Job Training for Individuals with Disabilities** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFS3JXysF2I>
- **September 24, 2021 - Hiring People with Disabilities: What Employers Need to Know** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnY4OPJ-XJA>
- **June 22, 2021 - Expanding Your Workforce Webinar: Hiring People with Disabilities** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xENZqeFGSpU>

The Legislature can continue to raise awareness and advance legislation that incentivizes hiring people with disabilities, ensures information on resources available to the disability community is accessible to the public and increases transportation options for individuals with disabilities. Through these efforts, the Legislature can make real strides in making gainful employment a reality for the many people currently out of the workforce in the disability community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter. We look forward to working with you on behalf of the business community to increase employment participation for individuals with disabilities. If you have any questions or would like to further discuss, please contact Ray Cantor at [rcantor@njbja.org](mailto:rcantor@njbja.org) or Alexis Bailey at [abailey@njbja.org](mailto:abailey@njbja.org).