

**Please Oppose Bills to Eliminate
Vocational Centers and 14(c) Wage Certificates for
Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

The Raise the Wage Act:

H.R. 582 – Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA)

S. 150 – Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-VT)

The Transformation to Competitive Employment Act:

H.R. 873 – Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA)

S. 260 – Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA)

Specialized wage certificates under Section 14 (c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act give thousands of individuals with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to work in a specialized environment that nurtures them and accommodates their mental, physical and behavioral challenges. They earn wages that are appropriate to their level of productivity and their capacity to work. Employment usually takes place at facility-based work centers, formerly called sheltered workshops. These vocational centers provide a specialized environment for a special population. They cater to a cohort of individuals with both higher abilities and higher needs, a group of people who desire to work, but who may be subject to frequent seizures, who may act out physically, even violently, when stressed, or who may need help toileting or to have their adult diaper changed. These centers provide more than employment. They also provide opportunities to build self-esteem, develop friendships, and to engage in their communities. People who work at these centers do so without fear of being fired, or of having to live up to competitive standards of productivity in order to show their worth. Wages, though appreciated, are not the primary reward for these individuals.

In the first weeks of the 116th Congress, two bills have been introduced in the House and Senate that would eliminate these employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Proponents of these bills describe them as civil rights issues, asking:

“If a non-disabled person has the right to work for competitive wages, why should a person with intellectual disabilities be denied the right to work for full, competitive wages?”

This appears to be a perfectly reasonable question, until you think of the different forms of disability, and the severity of some intellectual disabilities. Then the matter becomes complicated, as not all disabilities are equal. A more accurate question would be:

“If a non-disabled person has the right to work for competitive wages, why should a person with intellectual disabilities who is capable of working at an equal capacity be denied the right to work for competitive wages? And why should a person who is not capable of working at a competitive capacity be denied the opportunity to perform any work at all?”

Why VOR opposes these bills:

While both of these bills are aimed at providing competitive, integrated employment for those capable of achieving this level of employment, they also insist on eliminating the current opportunities provided for those not capable or not desiring this level of employment. These two bills echo “one size fits all” thinking that marginalizes individuals who have severe intellectual, behavioral, and medical challenges.

Why VOR supports keeping Section 14 (c) special wage certificates and vocational centers:

Promoting competitive employment for people with visual, auditory, and physical disabilities as well as many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, is a noble effort, a true civil rights issue that is overdue. But creating opportunities for those who are capable of integrated, competitive employment should not eliminate current opportunities at work centers for persons with severe disabilities.

Retaining specialized wage certificates under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards, and supporting work centers will help persons with severe intellectual, behavioral, and medical challenges continue to find success in productive work, earn a wage, build self-confidence, make friends and participate in their communities.

Eliminating specialized wage certificates under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act will cause many individuals with severe disabilities to have fewer, not more, employment choices available to them. Requiring higher wages to be paid by vocational centers will ultimately cause them to close.

VOR is asking that you review both the Raise the Wage Act and the Transformation to Competitive Employment Act. We ask that you retain specialized wage certificates under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards and the choice of employment at vocational centers. Give your support to persons with the most severe intellectual, behavior, and medical challenges.