

Waterman, Robert - WHD

From: Nancy Hutchison <nhutchison@centurytel.net>
Sent: Sunday, October 04, 2015 4:39 PM
To: WHDPRAComments
Subject: Comments about 14(c) proposed revisions
Attachments: September 30.docx

Attached is a Word document concerning the proposed changes.



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September 30, 2015

Re: Section 14 (C) Proposed Revision Comments
Control #1235-0001

After attending a workshop yesterday regarding the future of sheltered workshops and their employees, I was utterly dismayed. The rehabilitation guest speaker informed us about broad changes and that the sheltered workshops will no longer exist as we know them. In attendance were the workshop employees, clients, parents and other relatives and friends. After her presentation, not a single person was happy with the changes. They were astonished that the government was going to treat them as indigents because they knew they could not work a regular job. If they could, they would already be there.

Obviously, the individuals who wrote the proposals have no idea about intellectually disabled people. Accommodations can be made for individuals with physical disabilities and have for decades and they are integral contributors to the workforce. However intellectually disabled people usually have a plethora of other conditions and problems. Accommodations would never be the same for each person and another barrier would be that accommodations would need to be invisible and not tangible (as a wheelchair ramp) because of behavior problems and immaturity.

My son is 37 years old and has worked at New Hope Sheltered Workshop in Searcy, AR for over ten years. The proposed changes plan for him to work at a regular job for 15/20 hours a week with a job coach who will leave after 1/3 months and that he could continue on making minimum wage. This is absolutely utopia and a pipe dream. Looks and sounds good on paper, but in reality this is an atomic bomb and the fallout will change thousands of lives and families for the worse.

Of the 60 clients in attendance, my son is one of only 3 or 4 who might with a job coach, work in a regular job that no one else would want to do including him, but he could never survive without a coach. He does not have the ability, emotional or social maturity to do this. Would you send a seven year old out into the workforce? Of course not, that would be abuse. Same applies to my son who happens to be happy working at the workshop for less than minimum wage, where he is loved and treated with respect. My son will NEVER be able to do a job in the "regular" workforce and earn a living. We are not talking about teen-agers. These are adults who have been in a sheltered workshop setting for years. You plan to move them into a regular job, no matter how menial, a job setting that is way beyond their ability so they can hopefully work for minimum wage and therefore not be disabled any more.

According to the workshop, my son with a job coach can work in a menial job, but his productivity is measured against an employee without disability so if he does 10% of work that a regular worker he gets 10% of the pay or could be 20%, etc. Making \$9.00 an hour, he would get less than a \$1.00 an hour for 10% and \$1.80 for 20%. In this situation, my son would be doing all he is capable of doing and it would never get any better. After working a certain period a worker is no longer considered disabled and disability status is revoked as well as disability money. This is an improvement? This sounds barbaric to me and a sly maneuver to get out of funding workshops.

If successful clients will potentially have their benefits reduced and/or eliminated because they make too much money. Workshops provide transportation to and from work . No transportation to and from work is provided. Do you think these people can drive much less own a car? They have nothing to do or nowhere to go after working 15/20 hours a week. After the job coach leaves they will be back at the workshop because they were let go or they could not do the job because of their mental disability. The employer will have received his tax break and legal obligation will have been fulfilled so he is finished with the disabled. Also, this gives the impression that the job coach is training a seal instead of a human being. There are too many negative variables for this to succeed. Workers are subject to mistreatment by employees, employer, and the public because they will be working in the public setting. They are subject to many behavior problems, temper tantrums, too trusting, easily manipulated, and the list goes on and on. They easily forget, cannot remember items in a series and can only do one thing at a time.

Workshops will be turned into sitters for the handicapped. Now they still learn, make progress, learn new skills, set goals and strive to attain these goals. Their IEP progression will become null and void. One might as well hire a sitter and keep them at home out of sight. The clients are real people with real needs and you cannot hide them in the workplace. No one is embarrassed or shameful that they work in a sheltered environment with similar people. It is called sheltered for a reason. **THEY CANNOT WORK AT A REGULAR JOB FOR REGULAR PAY.** My point is that they are happy with their current status, make a decent salary based on what they can do and everyone does something. Although higher functioning but intellectually disabled, my son is not worth minimum wage and I am not stressed about it. **The other rewards he gets at the workshop far outweigh a minimum wage salary!** This workshop has job coaches and has since its creation trained and moved individuals who can into regular jobs. However, now clients with more severe disabilities are about to be pushed into the job market. In my opinion this is doomed for failure because it is impossible, created by people who are ignorant of the handicapped and sheltered workshops. Unfortunately the ones who will suffer this tragedy are those who have a mental and/or physical disability.

I am sure the health and welfare of the disabled is not a priority of these revisions. It's all about the money. If one thinks these revisions are going to lead to financial independence for the disabled, they are not living in the real world. It was mentioned they have not been integrated into society because they work in a sheltered workshop with like kind. We have not hidden away the disabled since WWII and they are a visible part of society. Working in a workshop keeps them safe and happy plus earning additional money which helps support low income households. Instead of saving money, it seems to me like the proposed changes would cost the taxpayer more money. My son does not work in a sweatshop and he, along with each client, receives all the support services they need. Unless you deal with adults with disabilities, government needs to stay out of trying to change workshops. Why would any lawmaker try to fix something that is not broken??