

August 15, 2013

Dear Legislators,

The unemployment and underemployment of people with disabilities in Wisconsin is a serious issue that impacts multiple public systems. ([The employment rate is 70% for working-age persons without disabilities, while only 37% of people with disabilities are in the workforce.](#)) Our organization applauds all efforts by the legislature to address this issue and improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. ***Therefore we request that you sign on as a co-sponsor of LRB 2690 to increase availability of vocational rehabilitation services in Wisconsin.***

This bill will provide the necessary state dollars to capture the total estimated federal matching funds available for vocational rehabilitation services for people with disabilities in Wisconsin. The state to federal match is generous at 21.3% state funds to 78.7% federal funds. [The fiscal bureau has determined this investment will eliminate a growing waiting list that stands currently at 4,129 individuals.](#) If a portion of this additional funding were also targeted toward increasing the availability of rehabilitation counselors statewide (9), as the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) has suggested is necessary, the investment could result in serving a total of 5,736 additional individuals.

According to DWD, the 3,250 DVR consumers who returned to the workforce in 2012 are projected to earn \$56.4 million annually, representing ***a 210 percent return on the public investment.*** These earnings result in purchases of goods and services that in turn support Wisconsin's economy and transform successful DVR customers into workers and taxpayers, while also decreasing dependence on public assistance (i.e. utilization of food stamps, low income housing and Social Security Benefits.)

***The deadline for co-sponsorship of LRB 2690 is Friday August 16th at 5:00 pm.*** Senator Shilling will be introducing the senate version of this bill, and Representative Shankland will be introducing the assembly companion bill. If you would like to be added as a co-sponsor, please contact Annika Petty in Rep. Shankland's office by 5:00pm on Friday, August 16.

We welcome additional ideas on how to improve employment for people with disabilities or how to increase employers' capacity to hire workers with disabilities. Please contact our organization if you are interested in championing this important cause in any way.

Sincerely,

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**Protection and advocacy for people with disabilities.**