



# A Better Bottom Line:

**EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

## A Letter from the Chair

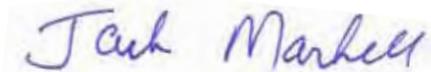
Today, Americans with disabilities are facing disproportionately high rates of unemployment compared to Americans without disabilities. As America confronts broader challenges around developing our workforce and creating jobs, it is important to keep in mind that not everyone is affected equally. Individuals with disabilities should have, to the maximum extent possible, the same opportunities as all others do: to live close to family and friends; to live independently and in safe communities; to engage in productive employment; and to participate in community life. That's why my initiative, *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities*, will focus on providing these opportunities.

*A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities* aims to increase employment among individuals with disabilities. Specifically, my initiative will focus on the employment challenges that affect individuals with intellectual and other significant disabilities and the role that both state government and business can play in facilitating and advancing opportunities for these individuals to be gainfully employed in the competitive labor market. Successfully achieving that goal will require not only attention to appropriate training, job placement, and work-based support but also advancing best practices and meaningful engagement of the business community. Because government, business, the general public, individuals with disabilities, and their families all stand to benefit from increased employment of people with disabilities, all have a role and shared responsibility in reaching this goal.

The initiative will provide governors and other state policymakers with better policy options to assess the environment in their state and strategies designed to support this population. A major emphasis will be on people who have significant intellectual and developmental disabilities and may require supports like job coaches and personal attendants in order to live and work in the community. We will convene governors, businesses, disability leaders, and other thought leaders throughout the year to share ideas and move forward with support for this population.

Together, we can ensure that individuals with disabilities will have opportunities for a brighter future.

Sincerely,



National Governors Association Chair, 2012-2013



## The Challenges

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, only 20 percent of people with disabilities either are employed or are seeking employment compared to 69 percent of the population without disabilities. Of those individuals with disabilities seeking employment, 15 percent have not found employment—compared to 8 percent for everyone else.

Historically, our country has made efforts to address this challenge, but there is more to be done. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) was enacted by the U.S. Congress and signed into law on July 26, 1990, and later amended with changes effective January 1, 2009. ADA provides a broad range of civil rights protections for individuals with disabilities, including protections from employment discrimination. In June 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered an historic decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 to ensure the promotion of community integration for individuals with disabilities rather than unnecessary segregation. Providing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities is an important factor in promoting their integration into the community.

Now, as unemployment is affecting many populations of workers, governors need to make a concentrated effort to support some of the most vulnerable and hardest to serve. State executives are challenged to ensure that all citizens, inclusive of those with disabilities, have the opportunity to find productive employment.

## The Opportunity

This initiative will focus on the employment challenges faced by individuals with intellectual and other significant behavioral and physical disabilities and the roles that both state government and business can play in helping people with disabilities overcome those challenges. The best way to achieve the vision and goals is for the public agencies, businesses, and the disability community to work together to chart the path forward. My initiative will:

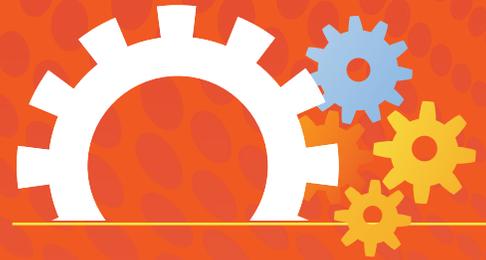
- Create a blueprint for businesses and states that identifies best practices and outlines steps that can be put in place to increase employment of people with disabilities; and
- Heighten awareness and launch a campaign to help governors put in place the practices that fit best in their state's efforts to increase employment for people with disabilities.

## Why?

Advancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities is:

- **The Right Thing To Do**—Individuals with disabilities have demonstrated ability and are an untapped resource.
- **The Smart Thing for Government to Do**—Individuals with disabilities are heavily reliant on government benefits. When people with disabilities are employed and living more independently, they are less reliant on government payments and contribute to the economy.
- **Makes Good Business Sense**—Individuals with disabilities are a valuable asset for business. There are business models throughout the United States with proven results.

We will solicit input from national leaders and governors of states demonstrating best practices in the subject area. Our action will include evaluating the gains from this effort; holding regional forums inclusive of governors and business leaders to discuss challenges and successes; and showcasing best practices of peer businesses to dispel myths around hiring individuals with disabilities.



The initiative will advance employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities by:

- Educating both private sector and public sector employers about accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace and the benefits of doing so;
- Supporting state governments in joining with business partners to develop blueprints to promote the hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities in integrated employment in both the public and private sectors; and
- Establishing public-private partnerships to build out those blueprints and increase employment of individuals with disabilities.

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