Community Employment Alliance
Since 1974

Many Voices / One Vision
The Community Advocacy Coalition for Developmental Disabilities

Lowering the Eligibility Age for DDA Supported Employment and Community Inclusion Services from 21 to 18

Why This Matters:

- **Starting Younger:** Individuals with disabilities should not have to wait until they turn 21 to receive job coaching supports for paid employment. Early employment, starting as young as 18, sets the stage for increased success and economic independence.
- **Bridge the Service Gap (Age 18-21):** Many individuals transition out of school-based services by age 18, leaving a gap until age 21 when DDA services begin. This bill closes that gap and aligns Supported Employment with services such as Job Foundations, School-to-Work (STW), and DVR extended services.
- **Achieving Employment at an Age Closer to their Peers:** Most teenagers get their first job around age 16. With this bill, individuals with disabilities can begin their employment journey closer to when their peers do, promoting equity and inclusion.

The Benefits of Early Employment:

- **Becoming a Taxpayer & Lifelong Wage-Earning**: Research shows that individuals who begin working earlier are more likely to achieve long-term employment success. An 18-year-old who holds an entry-level job is better positioned to become a lifelong wage earner and taxpayer, contributing to their community and the broader economy.
- **Real-World Experience:** Early employment provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to gain valuable life skills, experience the dignity of risk, and learn from mistakes. These opportunities foster maturity and independence.
- **Undoing Low Expectations:** Historically, expectations for people with disabilities have been too low. This bill reinforces the idea that *individuals with disabilities can achieve the same milestones as their peers.*

How the Bill Enhances Existing Services:

- **Not Duplicating, But Enhancing School Services:** This bill complements, not duplicates, school transition services. It provides professional employment supports without replacing school responsibilities. Students may graduate before age 22 if their IEP team decides that is best for them.*
- **Concurrent Services:** The bill allows individuals to participate in both employment and community inclusion activities at a younger age, supporting a full day.
- **Supporting Independence:** By lowering the eligibility age to 18, individuals will have access to the supports they need to thrive in their community, build relationships, and live independently.

Supporting Statistics:

- Employment Rates are lower for youth with disabilities**

Percent Employed

	Age 16-19	Age 20-24
Disability	**22%**	**46%**
No Disability	33%	68%

- Research on youth with disabilities has shown that paid employment is a predictor for post-school independent living and a predictor of post-school education and employment***

> Being employed gives me a sense of independence as I feel like I make a valuable contribution to each of my jobs. I have developed new friendships at work and have been able to join my work group in outside activities such as bowling. Having a job makes it possible for me to be in the community rather than sitting at home doing nothing.
>
> -Jessica Hansen

Support our youth with disabilities to succeed!

*Tips from the Special Education division (p. 2)
**Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics (p. 7)
***Secondary Transition Predictors of Postschool Success (p. 12) **Predictors of Post School Outcomes (p. 53 and p. 57)