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**Workplace Choice for Individuals with Disabilities**

(Washington, D.C.) – Congressman Glenn Grothman (WI-06) today introduced a bill to significantly increase career opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

The Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act will roll back a misguided regulation that significantly narrowed Congress’s definition of Competitive Integrated Employment and effectively reduced career opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

“Under my legislation, individuals with disabilities, after high school, can go to their local vocational rehabilitation agency to gain workplace skills, and then be referred by the agency to a job that fits their needs,” said Grothman.

“Yael Kerzan is a young lady from my district who was helped by this referral program before Congress changed the rules. She is concerned that others like her won’t be able to enjoy the opportunities and experiences she’s had since she was referred through her local agency in Portage, WI, 17-years ago.

“It has been invaluable for young people like Yael to have the choice and flexibility to work in a fulfilling job that provides them with the dignity they deserve as vital members of our communities. That is the reason I introduced the Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act.”

**Background**

In 2014, Congress passed the very popular Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which made significantly positive improvements to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Unfortunately, despite the many improvements made in WIOA to improve coordination between workforce development programs and local businesses, the new law was used as an opportunity to regulate what Competitive Integrated Employment means for individuals with disabilities.
The regulation and sub-regulatory guidance created confusion among state vocational rehabilitation agencies in whether they could refer individuals with disabilities to AbilityOne or state-use jobs. As a result, many state vocational rehabilitation agencies have adopted a blanket denial approach that deprives individuals with disabilities from being referred to valuable employment opportunities in a wide variety of settings, from community rehabilitation programs to jobs in federal and state government buildings. As a result, young people with disabilities are too-often left no option but to retire to the couch, or worse. The alternative, which will become reality under the Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act, is that these individuals will be offered the opportunity to be placed in a job that provides them with financial compensation, workforce experience, friends and social experience and a sense of dignity and respect that can only be derived from an honest day’s work.

The Workplace Choice and Flexibility for Individuals with Disabilities Act will provide clarity to the statutory definition of Competitive Integrated Employment in WIOA (originally in the Rehabilitation Act). Specifically, it will do so by stating that Competitive Integrated Employment includes jobs under federal and state set-aside contracts, with the goal of improving employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including AbilityOne jobs. It also clarifies that Competitive Integrated Employment includes work that involves social and interpersonal interactions with colleagues, vendors, customers, superiors, or other individuals that the employee may come into contact with during a given workday.
