

March 27, 2014

The Honorable Fran Pavley  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for SB 577 Developmental Services - Employment

Dear Senator Pavley,

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF) enthusiastically supports SB 577 (Community Prevocational Services for People with Developmental Disabilities). SB 577 seeks to establish a regional center service specifically to support people with developmental disabilities to identify their interest and strengths related to possible employment, find volunteer or internship opportunities for them to try out different types of work, receive the necessary training or education, network, and to seek employment.

SB 577 seeks to further the implementation of California's Employment First Policy, signed into law on October 9, 2013, by Governor Brown, which makes it the policy of the state that "opportunities for integrated competitive employment shall be given the highest priority for working age individuals with developmental disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disabilities."

Current Regional Center service categories are not designed for the type of employment preparation that is necessary to support people with significant disabilities to get regular jobs at regular pay. Similarly, the job development rates for supported employment services through the Department of Rehabilitation are not intended to support these employment preparation activities.

The lack of funding for these critical pre-employment supports is an important contributor to California ranking only 35 out of 44 states in integrated employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities. Also, EDD data shows that only 12.45% of working age people with developmental disabilities are employed. Unfortunately, this includes many people working very few hours a week, making sub-minimum wage, and working in segregated facilities. These appalling employment statistics represent wasted talents, deferred dreams, and hundreds of millions in unnecessary costs to the state supporting people in non-work and segregated services.

The Lanterman Act envisions that people with developmental disabilities be supported "to approximate the pattern of everyday living available to people without disabilities of the same age,... to be integrated into the mainstream of life in their home communities" and receive services and supports that enable them to live "more independent, productive, and normal lives" (WIC Section 4501).

People with significant developmental disabilities can work with the right supports and be viewed as valued employees.

We urge your support of SB 577, which will help give people a chance for a regular job, in their community, with decent pay; a chance to contribute and be valued at a work site; a chance to make friends with co-workers and be more a part of their communities; a chance to pull themselves out of poverty and reduce their reliance on state support; a chance for a life of greater dignity.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan R. Henderson" followed by a horizontal line.

Susan Henderson  
Executive Director