



Washington Insider – Monthly Newsletter

*Building a Better Economic Future for Americans with Disabilities
and Their Families*

National Disability Institute (NDI) is a not-for-profit research and community development organization dedicated exclusively to promote work, saving, and asset building for persons with disabilities and their families nationwide. As the creator of the Real Economic Impact Tour NDI is creating a roadmap to financial stability and independence for people with disabilities and their families. From Capitol Hill to state capitols, from urban centers to rural communities across the country, NDI invites you to join with us to promote an economic empowerment agenda, with a focus on policy change and public-private collaboration. Help advance solutions to the challenges of poverty adversely impacting the independence and quality of life for millions of individuals with disabilities regardless of age, gender or race.

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Key Congressional Committees briefed by NDI and other organizations supporting ABLE Act

Organizations in support of the ABLE Act joined forces on September 9, 2009 as part of the Collaboration to Promote Self-Determination's Annual Meeting to brief key staff on the Committees of Jurisdiction in both the House and Senate about H.R. 1205/S. 493, the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act of 2009 (ABLE Act of 2009). In addition to highlighting the key provisions of the legislation, NDI also reiterated its request that specific amendments be included in the Committee's consideration of the bill, in particular the replacement of the tax deduction with a refundable tax credit so that more individuals with disabilities (especially low-income citizens) would be able to practically take advantage of the introduction of ABLE accounts through this tax incentive. This recommended enhancement was greatly embraced by majority staff of the House Ways & Means Committee, who have key jurisdiction over the ABLE Act in the House of Representatives.

Although feedback from the staff of all Committees was relatively optimistic, one area of concern that the advocacy community will need to address is recommended offsets to pay for the bill. An updated score of the legislation (as currently written, which would not include the tax credit) is expected to be published by the Joint Committee on Taxation over the next two weeks. Given the tremendous cost-containment strategies being deployed by the Congress in an effort to pay for health care reform legislation and prepare for the end-of-the-year budget reconciliation process, there is tremendous pressure not to move any legislation that does not pay for itself. Thus, the core group of organizations supporting the legislation are working diligently on drafting key recommendations for potential offsets to neutralize the overall score of the legislation.

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WIA Reauthorization Gaining Momentum: NDI to Participate in National Listening Session Hosted by Department of Labor on October 1

Despite the national focus on health care reform, activities spurred both by the U.S. Department of Labor as well as the key Committees of Jurisdiction on Capitol Hill suggest that reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) may still see the light of day before the end of the year.

In an effort to better capture recommended policy reforms, the Department of Labor's Employment & Training Administration (ETA) and Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has invited 20 organizations to participate as guest speakers in an upcoming Listening Session on WIA Reauthorization, scheduled for October 1, 2009. NDI's

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Executive Director, Michael Morris, will be testifying on the organization's recommendations, which will include the following suggested recommendations related to the promising practices learned from the Disability Program Navigator (DPN) as well as promotion of economic advancement among individuals with disabilities through a concerted emphasis around asset development and financial literacy:

(1) Improve Cross-System Collaboration and Responsiveness to Job Seekers with Disabilities.

The Disability Program Navigator (DPN) system has shown promise in improving access to the One Stop Career Center system. In order to strengthen the DPN system, it is recommended that the WIA reauthorization include a statutory requirement to maintain the DPN system, with expansion to all 50 states. Statewide employment and training activities should include, among other things, deployment of an effective and responsive statewide system of full-time dedicated expert staff to navigate a pathway to higher skilled and higher paying jobs and economic security for individuals with disabilities and others with multiple barriers to employment by improving:

- meaningful and effective participation in and outside the One-Stop systems including physical, communication and programmatic access;
- coordination and collaboration among employment and training and asset development programs carried out at a state and local level; and
- critical linkages to the business community.

(2) Promote Economic Advancement among Individuals with Disabilities.

Local employment and training activities should improve coordination between employment and training activities and asset development services and supports at a local level to advance economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. At a state level, the state plan should describe proposed objectives to link and improve the relationship between workforce investment and economic advancement activities that provide a path to self-sufficiency, short and long term.

Activity on Capitol Hill may be spurring the Department of Labor's growing interest in WIA reauthorization. Despite the transition in leadership for the Senate HELP Committee – which changed hands from the late Senator Kennedy to Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) in mid-September – intelligence from current Committee staff suggests that WIA reauthorization remains a top priority for the Committee to move forward before year's end. Additionally, the House Education & Workforce Committee staff is also preparing its package related to WIA Reauthorization, especially given tremendous pressure on the government to address the continued decline in available jobs in the current economic environment.

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Concerns over Lack of Enthusiasm for Asset Development within U.S. Department of Labor

Asset development advocates are growing increasingly concerned about efforts to eliminate asset development as a key area of emphasis for the Department of Labor. This would include any efforts on the part of the Department of Labor to improve financial literacy education and have VITA sites at One-Stop Centers.

Advocates in the asset development and disability communities have expressed concerns regarding this sudden shift in priorities within the Department of Labor, given the strong correlation among training, employment, asset development and economic self-sufficiency. The Department of Labor has been participating up to this point in an internal, cross-agency collaboration focused on coordinating and improving the federal government's commitment toward the promotion of asset development strategies, financial literacy programs, and other initiatives that improve the overall economic advancement of individuals from all backgrounds (including those with disabilities). The future of DOL's participation in this and other efforts to promote the economic advancement of individuals with disabilities remains unclear.

NDI will continue to work with other organizations to attempt to advocate for continued prioritization of asset development strategies within the U.S. Department of Labor's vision and objectives.

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SPECIAL IN-FOCUS: *NDI Sponsoring Annual Summit on Asset Development in Washington DC (October 20, 2009)*

The National Disability Institute (NDI) will be hosting its annual Asset Development Policy Summit on October 20, 2009 in Washington DC. The summit will take place at the World Bank (Room MC2-800), located at 1818 H Street NW in Washington DC. To participate in this Asset Development Summit, please R.S.V.P. to Margaret Callahan at mcallahan@ndi-inc.org or (202) 296-2041 by October 10th, 2009.

The purpose of the NDI Asset Development Policy Summit is to bring together diverse stakeholders local, national and international agencies, leaders in the disability community, representatives of the asset building and business communities, self-advocates, and family members of individuals with disabilities. Local partners will then have an opportunity to participate in a longer-term dialogue to create a roadmap to build a better economic future for individuals with disabilities and their families in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

The Asset Development Summit for People with Disabilities has been designed to increase outreach and promote provision of services to individuals with disabilities through the establishment of collaborative relationships with key entities in the disability

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and asset building communities. The focus in this year's program differs slightly from last year's well-attended policy summit, in that the program is divided among two key areas. First, the morning session will be focused on developing an Asset Development strategic plan among local disability and asset development stakeholders in the Washington DC metropolitan area. In contrast, the afternoon sessions will be devoted to evaluating trends in asset development policy at both the federal and international levels. Agency officials from the FDIC, IRS, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Treasury, and the White House have all been invited to speak during the lunch and afternoon sessions of the upcoming summit. Participants may sign up for one or both sessions. [Back to Top](#)

U.S. DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT PROFILE	
August 2009	
% of people with disabilities in the labor force	23.0%
Unemployment rate of persons with a disability	22.2%

As reported by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics for August 2009

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DISCLAIMER

This monthly publication is intended primarily for the thousands of volunteers, community organizers, asset building coalition members, business and government leaders and individuals with disabilities and family members who join with the National Disability Institute (NDI) to promote and build a better economic future for youth and working age adults with disabilities nationwide. This publication will provide a general overview of the federal government process and key developments in the federal policy arena. The content is intended to provide factual information, and any interpretative statements are solely those of the editor.