

Submitter: Joyce Bernheim
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB810

I am the parent of a 30-year old son who is autistic and intellectually disabled. He works full-time in a competitive employment job with the support of a job coach provided through Vocational Rehabilitation. He has held the same job for 5 years. He is highly valued by his employer because of his work ethic and competency. Because he is paid minimum wage, he makes too much for social security, so his dependence on government benefits is reduced. He interacts regularly with other employees at work, which he enjoys and which is quite important for his mental and physical well-being. So, I fully support the goal of moving as many I/DD individuals as possible into competitive integrated employment.

My only reservation with SB 810 is the language prohibiting any use of DHS funds for employment in sheltered workshops. I currently chair the Oregon Commission on Autism and have been active in autism policy venues for more than 25 years. In those capacities I have heard from individuals and family members representing the full spectrum of the autism population. Among those voices are the parents of the most severely affected autistic individuals. Many autistic individuals cannot speak for themselves and some strong self-advocate voices do not themselves understand the needs of more severely affected individuals. Amy Lutz, one of the founders of the National Council on Severe Autism, advocates for the availability of sheltered work for autistic individuals with very high support needs.

Based on the wide spectrum of need and preference within the autism population, I am loath to remove an option that may be appropriate for some I/DD individuals. I would favor retaining the ability of DHS to support sheltered work, but developing standards that made competitive integrated work the default first option and that articulated objective criteria for access to sheltered work.