

House Committee on Education and Workforce

Hearing on “Work, Dignity, and Choice in Disability Employment”

February 13, 2026

Testimony of Kathy Armstrong

My name is Kathy Armstrong. I am the proud Mother of Klara, our thirty-seven-year-old daughter with Down Syndrome.

I have a degree in Special Education and have taught for 40 years in various educational settings, which has helped tremendously over the years to make the best decisions for Klara. I am lucky to be able to advocate for her best interests.

I am involved with Special Olympics Wisconsin as a Swim Coach for Dodge County Special Olympics and my husband, Klara’s Dad, Greg, has helped coach Basketball. I also help our local Dodge County, Wisconsin, organization throughout the year with social activities and events planned to enhance the lives of Klara and her friends. By being involved with so many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at various age groups, I have witnessed first-hand the reality of some that cannot find or hold jobs after they leave high school. They may work with the Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), but have a difficult time finding and maintaining a job for very long, especially in a rural community. Because of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA), this younger age group has to wait until age 26 before they can apply or come to work at a 14(c) Work Center. It is sad to hear them say they lost their Community Integrated Employment job because “the job didn’t need them anymore; they only work four hours a week and stay home the rest of the time” or hear them say they “were not fast enough to stay up with the job.” It is sad for me to hear that they are penalized for these reasons. Many end up staying at home doing nothing. How sad to lose a job and have to fail over and over again. This does not help these young people gain confidence. If a job cannot be found in the Community Integrated Employment, why shouldn’t a person before age twenty-six be given the opportunity to find success at a Work Center that has a 14(c) certificate?

Why waste time and years trying to find a job when a possibility could be found working at the pace and skill level that suits them the best. To our family, this is another reason why 14(c) Certificates are so vital to so many. Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) can find success right away in a job that they can handle, they can increase productivity at their own pace, they can be proud of working every day, all day long!

I am proud to be a part of A-Team Wisconsin and A-Team USA. This grassroots organization works to protect the choice of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (IDD) who work at

Community Rehabilitation Programs under Section 14(c). We are an advocacy group that brings families together to share one voice to advocate for the continuation of 14(c) Work Centers. We are in total support of the 14(c) law, as it offers our daughter the choice to go to work every day, all day. She can work at her developmental ability and she can be proud of the job she is doing. Klara takes great pride in going to work every day and doing her best! She is so proud of her job!

Klara and I have visited Washinton, DC to speak with Congressman Grothman. He is our BEST advocate for people with Developmental Disabilities! We met with Senator Ron Johnson and Representatives Steil, Van Orden, Fitzgerald, Grothman, Tiffany and Gallagher. We shared our story. I was proud of Klara to share how important her job is to her! I was impressed that everyone truly listened to her message about her job.

It is very important to our family that Klara has every opportunity to succeed in her life, to be happy and to have her voice and choice be heard. Our family recognizes that all individuals with developmental disabilities need to have their voice heard as well. That is why our family will continue to advocate for Klara and for all her friends who need their voice to be heard. Today I am speaking for my daughter as well as all her friends and coworkers. We are speaking about **the most vulnerable population of workers who are impacted intellectually and physically.**

If 14(c) ended, our daughter (and friends) will lose “their choice” to work every day at their pace with their developmental ability. 14(c) provides “normality” (is what our family likes to refer it as). Klara sees her siblings having a job to go to work every day. She has seen her parents go to work all day, every day. This is “normal” work ethic. If 14(c) ends, she will have no job to go to every day, all day long.

She “may?”, and that is a big question in rural America, find a job for 5-8 hours a week. Klara has had two Community Integrated Employment jobs in the past, but they were only for six hours a week and one for eight hours a week. Both jobs ended as the employer needs were not met or the job “just ended.” In both cases, what about the rest of the hours in a day and in the week? Sitting at home or going to an Adult Day Center is just glorified babysitting. This option is like going back to the 1960’s early 1970’s, where adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities just sat home, went to a “Home” for people with Disabilities with nothing to do, or went to an Adult Day Program to watch TV, play Bingo, etc. There is no pride in doing that when one can find success in having a 14(c) job. I have seen this option as I volunteered at an Adult Day Program back then. It should not be the option for our daughter in 2026. No one should be making these rules without first speaking with those with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities **and** their Family/Guardian.

Our daughter, Klara, as well as her friends and the millions of other Intellectually or Developmentally Disabled (IDD) Americans across the great United States of America, deserve

to have a “normal” day to day job, just like every other human being. Many jobs provided for 14(c) ARE from the community or surrounding area. To our family, her current place of employment with the 14(c) certificate IS A COMMUNITY JOB! “Community Jobs” is current lingo for people with IDD to get a job in the community. Well, 14(c) does provide community jobs, as many businesses in our community and surrounding area send work to our work center as jobs for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The push to end 14(c) facilities is like **closing a community job for the most vulnerable population of disabilities who are the lowest functioning.**

Working with friends is an experience we all have in any job we choose. The support of staff to become a successful worker is important and part of the mission. 14(c) jobs bring our daughter and her friends pride, joy, and the opportunity to be like everyone else! She and others can proudly tell family, neighbors, friends, and everyone that she has a job, she goes to work every day, all day, and she LOVES IT!!!

We do not need our daughter to go from a contributing member of the workforce in our community to sitting at home/apartments/day care doing nothing. That should never be an option! We saw first-hand what the impact of not having a job to go to and sitting at home day after day, during the Pandemic. Many ended up with health issues, unhealthy diets, low activity levels and no social contacts during the Pandemic. Not having a job to go to everyday causes many of the same issues. Klara thrives on seeing her friends and coworkers (she is very social). She loves having her job at Green Valley Enterprises, a Division of Opportunities, Inc. as it gives her and her friends so much purpose in life....to have a job to go to everyday, all day long. We need to protect our most vulnerable population, those who don't have a voice. Our daughter is lucky to have us to use “our voice” to help support her choice of working with 14(c). We will continue to use “our voice” to speak for her friends who cannot speak for themselves but deserve to keep their job they find successful in 14(c). We are committed to advocate for all. 14(c) needs to continue and be expanded for all citizens with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

There are many higher functioning people with disabilities that can handle working at jobs in a community. They deserve that right as well. Those who cannot handle those jobs, or have failed trying, should not have the choice of 14(c) jobs taken away. I have always questioned WHY this population needs to fail? What is the purpose of that, when a job can be provided from the community and an individual can find success at doing this job at his/her own pace, with dignity and joy in doing the job to the BEST of THEIR ABILITY. 14(c) jobs ARE the jobs where they find SUCCESS. We owe it to all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to be able to find success, happiness and support in the job they choose. When I look at a school setting that promotes the “Least Restrictive Environment,” I look at how we should promote 14(c) as a “Least Restrictive Environment.” Here people find success and pride

in their job, here they work with friends, here they get the support they need emotionally and continued guidance and support on individual work goals, here they can work at their own pace and still succeed. Many times, I feel that in a small rural community, there are **NOT** a lot of options for our lowest intellectual and developmentally disabled population. We need to continue to support everyone with the BEST choice for each individual. Why not have options? Why not have an option for some individuals who find a job in the community for 4-8 hours a week to also be able to work at a work center with a 14(c) Certificate? To make a full week of work. **Why not support both options?** As I have said, some cannot or have failed trying to work in Community Integrated Employment. These individuals **should not be punished further by having their job, the one they can succeed in at the Work Center, to be taken away**. Who came up with this idea to take the 14(c) option away? Obviously, someone who has not talked to **all families or guardians who appreciate and value the SUCCESS a Work Center with 14(c)**.

It saddens me to think of all the states across the great USA that have lost their 14(c) Certificates. It saddens me to wonder what has happened to all of these individuals who have lost their jobs. Oh, I know someone may share one or two “success” stories of the FEW who went on to find a job, but I am sure they do not have a job that is EVERY DAY ALL DAY. I want to hear the stories of **every single one** of the 14(c) workers when their job ended and **where are they now**. What happened to these citizens who deserve to have a successful job? My guess, sitting at home, sitting in Adult Day Care, or there has been no programming available for them. My family cannot let that happen to Klara and all the workers with IDD. We have come too far in 2026 from the 1960’s to let this happen. In fact, I am hoping this hearing might spark a rejuvenation of allocating more monies for our most vulnerable population, IDD, Individuals with Developmental Disabilities, and to bring back 14(c) for everyone who deserves to find success, joy and dignity in their job, their contribution to society. Everyone deserves a choice and a voice.

This is a time when I hope lawmakers will do the right thing. Look at 14(c) in a new innovative way. Go visit and get a tour. Many 14(c) Centers are providing unbelievable full-time opportunities for all people with disabilities. We all need YOU to shine through with your kindness and compassion for ALL people with a disability, especially our most vulnerable, by continuing 14(c).