DEPUTY SECRETARY OF LABOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20210

MAR - 3 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Governor Abbott:

In July 2019, I wrote all states on the importance of collecting disability employment data. I was heartened by the positive response we received, not only related to this issue, but by the clear expression of interest in expanding employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in each respective state.

In that letter, I noted that July 26, 2020 will mark the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the landmark civil rights legislation that paved the way for millions of Americans with disabilities to more fully participate in all aspects of society, including employment. In 2019, Americans with disabilities aged 16 and older had the lowest annual unemployment rate since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began tracking this data in 2009. The Department of Labor sees this milestone anniversary as a unique opportunity to celebrate historic legislation that has led to job growth and community access for millions and to serve as a catalyst to further enhance disability employment policy for continued success in breaking down employment barriers.

In this spirit, provided below for your consideration are some suggested enhancements to state disability employment policy:

- **Encouraging state government agencies to become model employers of individuals with disabilities** by offering fast-track hiring initiatives, including excepted service hiring authorities and internship opportunities; providing a centralized accommodation program; ensuring on-line job applications are accessible and updating current policy requiring accessibility of websites, mobile apps, and online systems; appointing disability program managers and selective placement program coordinators; offering mandatory interviews for qualified applicants with disabilities; and offering disability etiquette training.

- **Building the capacity of private- and nonprofit-sector employers** to engage in disability employment efforts by adopting policies that extend diversity and inclusion to businesses contracting with state agencies comparable to those applicable to women and minorities; using tax incentives to encourage businesses to hire qualified applicants with disabilities, using tax credits for providing access to public transportation, adopting inclusive apprenticeship programs, providing technical assistance to businesses, and developing pipelines linking businesses with qualified applicants.

- **Facilitating work-based learning for youth and young adults** with disabilities that align with education and career development planning and meet businesses' predicted workforce needs by providing benefits counseling to youth and parents/guardians, ensuring career planning is included in Individualized Education Programs, offering work-based learning experiences, and promoting inclusive apprenticeship programs.

- **Implementing policies that optimize resources and services that reflect the Employment First policy** which promotes a framework for systems change centered on the premise that all people, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. States can accomplish this through interagency coordination, collaboration, and robust performance measures.

- **Supporting the retention of employees in the event of injury or illness** (on or off the job) or change of an individual's disability status through policies that support effective stay-at-work/return-to-work strategies.

- **Promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment** by including disability-owned businesses in targeted state procurement, certification, and financial incentive programs for small businesses by supporting fast-track certification and tax and financial incentives to support start-up technical assistance.

- **Improving access to transportation for people with disabilities** to get to work, including nondiscrimination requirements for transportation network programs and autonomous vehicles that address access for passengers with disabilities.

Finally, as I stated in my July 2019 letter, our State Exchange on Employment and Disability (SEED) initiative provides resources and subject matter expertise to assist states in advancing the employment of people with disabilities. SEED stands ready to assist you in developing policy related to any of the above issues or to assist in the development of your own ideas. For further information, please contact the Office of Disability Employment Policy's point of contact for SEED, Nadia Mossburg, at 202-845-5230 or mossburg.nadia.i@dol.gov.

Thank you for your efforts to promote the hiring, retention, and advancement of employees with disabilities in your state. We are very much looking forward to working with you and hearing about the exciting things your state will be doing to celebrate the ADA's 30th anniversary.

Sincerely,

PATRICK PIZZELLA