



# Reach Out e-Diversity News

An Electronic Publication of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council

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February 2015 Edition | Volume 9, Issue 1

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Read, Pass on to Friends, Family Members, Colleagues & Constituents



## A Fair Shot for Workers with Disabilities

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### Disability Advocates Sharply Critical of Plan to Ease Testing



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### United Nations General Assembly Adopts Resolution Tabled by Somalia on the Rights of People with Albinism

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### Reach Out e-Diversity Salutes Aaron Bishop



Reach Out e-Diversity recognizes Aaron Bishop, Commissioner, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) for his leadership and contributions on behalf of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## Nominate

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By Rebecca Vallas, Shawn Fremstad, Lisa Ekman

Disability can be both a cause and consequence of economic insecurity. It is a cause because disability or illness can lead to job loss and reduced earnings, barriers to education and skills development, significant additional expenses, and many other challenges that can lead to economic hardship. It can also be a consequence because poverty and economic insecurity can limit access to health care and preventive services and increase the likelihood that a person lives and works in an environment that may adversely affect health. As a result, poverty and disability go hand in hand.

Yet the intersection of disability and poverty is too rarely discussed. In fact, despite the fact that 1 in 5 Americans live with disabilities, the U.S. Census Bureau's annual report detailing income, poverty, and health insurance coverage did not even include poverty rates for people with disabilities until recently. It does now, and the most recent available data put the poverty rate for working-age people with disabilities at 34.5 percent in 2013, compared with

12.2 percent for those without disabilities.

Employment is obviously a big piece of the puzzle. While some people live with significant disabilities and severe health conditions that preclude employment, millions of individuals can and do work despite their disabilities. Yet workers with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed as their nondisabled counterparts. And for those who are employed, research documents a significant pay gap.

Considerable progress has been made toward removing barriers to employment, education, and accessibility in the past several decades. The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, enacted 25 years ago, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and mandates that people with disabilities must have "equal opportunity" to participate in American life. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, enacted the same year, requires that students with disabilities be provided a "free

appropriate public education" just like all other students.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, or WIOA, expanded access for people with disabilities to education and training programs, programs for transition-age youth and young adults transitioning to adulthood, vocational rehabilitation, and more. And most recently, the Achieving a Better Life Experience, or ABLE, Act, which was signed into law at the end of 2014, permits people with qualifying disabilities to open special savings accounts without jeopardizing eligibility for programs such as Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income, or SSI.

But much work remains. In order to break the link between disability and economic insecurity,



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we must enact public policies that give workers with disabilities a fair shot.

### Policy directions to give workers with disabilities a fair shot

With action needed to rebalance the Social Security trust funds, a great deal of attention is being paid to the Social Security Disability Insurance program, or Disability Insurance, with some calling for a fundamental overhaul of this vitally important program. Yet as noted by the National Council on Disability, it is often forgotten that:

Receipt of Social Security disability benefits is merely the last stop on a long journey that many people with disabilities make from the point of disability onset to the moment at which disability is so severe that work is not possible. All along this journey, individuals encounter the policies and practices of the other systems involved in disability and employment issues.

While there are certain reforms that would make it easier for disabled workers who receive Disability Insurance to test their ability to return to work—such as

simplifying the program’s work rules—most Disability Insurance beneficiaries live with such significant disabilities and severe illnesses that substantial work is unlikely.

Thus, to achieve the goal of supporting workers with disabilities in having a fair shot at gainful employment and economic security, policymakers must step back and take a much broader look at the policy landscape and how it affects workers with disabilities.

The following are potential policy directions that policymakers should consider.

- **Raise the minimum wage:** Raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour or higher would boost the incomes of many workers with disabilities, who are especially likely to work in low-wage jobs, and would help to reduce the disability pay gap.
- **Strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC:** Boosting the EITC for workers without dependent children, as called for in the previous CAP report “Harnessing the EITC and

Other Tax Credits to Promote Financial Stability and Economic Mobility,” would benefit more than 1 million workers with disabilities, who are more likely to work in low-wage jobs and who are also less likely to have children.

- **Expand Medicaid:** Expanding Medicaid—as 23 states continue to refuse to do—would make it possible for more low-income Americans to access preventive care and reduce financial strain for low-income individuals with disabilities.
- **Ensure paid leave and paid sick days:** Ensuring paid leave—such as through the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act, or FAMILY Act—as well as paid sick days—as the Healthy Families Act would do—would benefit both workers with disabilities and the 1 in 6 workers who care for family members with disabilities.
- **Improve access to long-term supports and services:** Ensuring access to long-term services and supports for workers with

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disabilities through a national Medicaid buy-in program with generous income and asset limits would remove a major barrier for employed individuals with disabilities who are working their way out of poverty. An enhanced federal match could ensure that there are no additional costs to states. No person with high support needs should be required to remain poor in order to gain access to the services and supports they need in order to work.

- **Institute a disabled worker tax credit:** This idea, which has received bipartisan support over the years, would enable workers with disabilities to offset the additional costs associated with their disabilities, thus reducing hardship and making it possible for them to work. The credit should be made refundable to ensure that low-income workers can access its benefits. Other important questions that need to be explored include which eligibility criteria to use and whether to structure it as a credit with a flat amount for all workers who qualify or to tie

its value to verifiable costs.

- **Adequately fund vocational rehabilitation:** Adequate funding for the vocational rehabilitation system is needed to ensure that all eligible individuals are able to access vocational rehabilitation services when they need them.
- **Create subsidized employment opportunities:** A national subsidized jobs program—modeled after states' successful strategies using Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund, or TANF EF, dollars in 2009 and 2010—is a policy solution with bipartisan appeal. As outlined in the forthcoming CAP report “A Subsidized Jobs Program for the 21st Century,” subsidized jobs, in which government reimburses employers for all or a portion of a worker's wages, offer a targeted strategy to help unemployed workers—including persons with disabilities—enter or re-enter the labor force and bolster their credentials while alleviating hardship in

the short term by providing immediate work-based income.

- **Leverage early intervention:** President Obama's FY 2015 budget outlined three potential approaches to early intervention and called for a demonstration project to evaluate their effectiveness. These or other approaches should be piloted to provide an evidence base for what works in this area.
- **Create a partial or temporary disability program:** The Social Security disability programs are restricted to people with disabilities or illnesses severe enough to preclude substantial work for at least one year or expected to result in death. Policymakers should explore the idea of a complementary program, perhaps administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, to provide people with disabilities or illnesses that do not rise to the level of eligibility for Social Security disability benefits with temporary income support accompanied by supports and services to aid

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in remaining at or returning to work.

- **Reform asset limits:** The ABLE Act, which allows people with disabilities to open special saving accounts without risking their eligibility in a number of government income support programs, represents an important step in the right direction, but it only helps a narrow subset of people with disabilities. To remove barriers to savings and ownership more broadly for workers with disabilities, Congress must take action to update SSI's outdated asset limits, as the SSI Restoration Act would do. Additionally, myRA accounts—a new type of retirement savings accounts established in 2014—should be excluded from counting against asset limits in income support programs such as SSI and Medicaid.

- **Ensure adequate affordable, accessible housing:** Funding for public housing and the Section 8 housing

voucher program should be substantially increased to meet the needs of low-income people with disabilities. Additionally, policymakers should leverage federal and state funding sources to create and expand incentives for the inclusion of housing units for low-income people with disabilities, as well as compliance with accessibility standards, in new housing development and construction, such as through the Section 811 Housing for Persons with Disabilities program. Ensuring the availability of affordable, accessible housing would enable more people with disabilities to obtain safe and stable housing, secure steady employment, and live independently.

- **Ensure adequate accessible transportation:** Funding for Federal Transit Administration programs such as para-transit, the Section 5310 Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities program, the United We Ride interagency

initiative, and other vital transportation programs should be increased to enable more people with disabilities to enjoy basic mobility and take jobs that they currently cannot travel to and from without spending hours in transit.

This list is far from comprehensive. But these steps would go a long way toward ensuring that poverty and disability no longer go hand in hand.

*Rebecca Vallas is the Director of Policy for the Poverty to Prosperity Program at the Center for American Progress.*

*Shawn Fremstad is a Senior Fellow at the Center and a senior research associate at the Center for Economic and Policy Research.*

*Lisa Ekman is the director of federal policy at Health & Disability Advocates.*

Center for American Progress



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## Disability Advocates Sharply Critical of Plan to Ease Testing By Michelle Diamant

As Congress looks to reauthorize the nation's primary education law, advocates are blasting proposed changes they say would lead to lower expectations for students with disabilities. At a U.S. Senate hearing (January, 2015), lawmakers began the process of updating the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now known as No Child Left Behind. Among the biggest changes under consideration is a shift in testing requirements.

Current regulations allow students with severe cognitive disabilities to take alternate assessments as opposed to the general, grade-level tests required of most students. Only 1 percent of all students — or roughly 10 percent of those with disabilities — can be counted as proficient by schools for taking these less-complex exams.

However, a draft proposal from U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., would lift the cap on the number of kids who could take alternate assessments.



In a letter this week to Alexander — who chairs the Senate's education committee — advocates called the plan “unacceptable.”

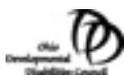
“(The proposal) could allow schools to take millions of students with disabilities out of the general assessment which would also often mean off track for a regular high school diploma — something that could happen as early as 3rd grade,” reads the letter signed by 25 disability advocacy groups as part of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities. “Unfortunately, the provisions in your draft would lower expectations for these students and ultimately limit their ability to become fully economically self-sufficient.”

The idea of opening up alternate assessments on a broader scale is particularly troubling because most students with disabilities are capable of grade-level work, said Lindsay Jones from the National Center for Learning Disabilities who helped draft the letter to Alexander.

With school curriculums largely tied to the bar set by standardized tests, Jones said that kids with disabilities would likely be provided less access and subject to lower expectations if schools are able to give alternate assessments in greater numbers. “I think everyone agrees we need an alternate assessment for kids with the most significant cognitive disabilities. For certain students it's appropriate, but for the vast majority — 90 percent of students with disabilities — it's not,” Jones said.

Meanwhile, disability advocates also said they're dismayed that Alexander's plan is silent on modified assessments — which were intended for children with disabilities considered too advanced for the alternate

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tests but unprepared for typical exams. The tests have largely been abandoned by states after advocates say they were widely abused.

Lawmakers said they are eager to move forward quickly with a revamp of No Child Left Behind and another Senate hearing on the matter is scheduled the first week of February. Alexander has indicated, however, that he is reluctant to put too many demands in place at the federal level.

“While the federal government has a very special role in ensuring that our students do not experience discrimination based on who they are or what their disability might be, Congress is not a national school board,” Alexander said at the hearing.

*Reprinted from disabilityscoop  
(January 23, 2015)*



### Did You Know?

**Title I of the ADA was adopted as a tool to encourage workplace participation, which is a critical element of full community integration. Yet, nearly 30 years after ADA enactment, attitudes, access, and accommodations remain barriers to inclusive living and earning.**

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## United Nations General Assembly Adopts Resolution Tabled by Somalia on the Rights of People with Albinism

On December 18, 2014, the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a historic resolution tabled by Somalia. The resolution declared June 13 of each year as International Albinism Awareness Day. The adoption of this resolution stunned the world particularly the members of the United Nations, as Somalia is still emerging from years of conflicts and multifaceted challenges. Somalia, in response to discrimination and attacks faced by people with Albinism in some parts of the world, was instrumental in bringing the issue to the attention of the UN Human Rights Council. Somalia is currently persuading the United Nations to appoint a global Special Representative for Albinism in order to protect the human rights of the people with Albinism.

Ambassador Yusuf Mohamed Ismail Bari-Bari, Somalia's Permanent Representative

to the UN Geneva led the presentation and negotiation of the draft resolution. The resolution calls on all stakeholders to use this day to take action that will end discrimination, stigma and attacks against persons with Albinism worldwide.

### What is Albinism?

Albinism is an inherited genetic condition that reduces the amount of melanin pigment formed in the skin, hair, and eyes. Albinism occurs in all racial and ethnic groups throughout the world. In the United States, approximately, one in 18,000 people has some type of Albinism. In other parts of the world the occurrence can be as high as one in 3,000. Most children with Albinism are born to parents who have normal hair and eye color for their ethnic backgrounds. A common myth is that people with Albinism have red eyes.



United Nations

Although some people had reddish or violet eyes, most have blue eyes and some have hazel or brown eyes. There are different types of Albinism and the amount of pigment in the eyes varies; however, all forms of Albinism are associated with vision problems that are not correctable with eyeglasses and many have low vision.

It is the abnormal development of the retina and abnormal patterns of nerve connections between the eye and the brain that cause vision problems. The presence of these eye problems defines the diagnosis of Albinism. The degree of impairment varies with the different type of Albinism,

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such as reading, riding a bike, fishing. Some have sufficient vision to drive a car.

Although people with Albinism may be considered “legally blind” with a corrected visual acuity of 20/200 or worse, most learn to use their vision in a variety of ways and are able to perform innumerable activities.

### What is the Global State of People with Albinism?

In the United States and other developed Western countries, most people with Albinism live a normal life and have the same types of general medical problems as the rest of the population. In underdeveloped countries, however, individuals with Albinism are at risk of isolation because the condition is often misunderstood. Social stigmatization can occur, especially within communities of color, where the race or paternity of a person with Albinism may be questioned.

There are human rights abuses against people with Albinism in many parts of the world, including East Africa. People with Albinism face stigma and discrimination. This is especially the case in East Africa, where people living with Albinism struggle with a culture of magic and superstition. People with Albinism are seen as people who are outcast and cursed.

In Tanzania, there is a whole system that trades on the body parts of people with Albinism. People with Albinism are killed for their body parts which are believed to possess magical

properties including the cure for HIV and cancer. This trade of body parts affecting neighboring countries such as Kenya where people are abducted and taken to Tanzania for profit.

In the sub Saharan Africa, there has been a long standing and widespread lack of public awareness about Albinism. Powerful myths exist, and as such, many families do not educate their children with Albinism. Also, employers avoid hiring people with Albinism due to fears that their customers and staff will “catch” the condition, or that food would be contaminated. As a result, many people with Albinism are not offered the same kind of social and physical contact, due to this kind of misinformation.

There is a considerable lack of glasses, magnifiers, and specialized vision sensitive computer equipment in Tanzania. This results



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in tremendous difficulty completing educational programs, increasing the likelihood of dropping out and subsequent unemployment.

The lack of or reduced levels of melanin in the skin of a person with Albinism creates high risk for skin cancer due to sun exposure. Combine this with the profound lack of protective sunscreens, wide brimmed hats, and proper clothing in Tanzania and you find epidemic rates of skin cancer in all ages. As a result, the average life expectancy for a person with Albinism in Tanzania is 30 years, with only 2% living beyond 40 years. In countries and circumstances where adequate health care is provided and widely known, people with Albinism have the same life expectancy as the general population.

### What can you do?

In order to change the human rights situation of people with



Albinism, there is need to take action. The following are activities that you can support.

- Host an International Albinism Awareness Day in your local community on June 13<sup>th</sup>
- Invite a local organization of persons with Albinism to address your organization
- Create discussion forums in your workplace on how to individually and collectively address the discrimination experienced by persons with Albinism due to our

belief systems

- Speak to your local, state, congressional legislator, councilmember or other elected official about the rights and aspirations on people with Albinism
- Sponsor a local television, radio, or print media campaign on June 13<sup>th</sup> to raise awareness about the rights of people with Albinism

**SomaliCAN** is willing to provide technical support for people with Albinism in Ohio who would be interested in leading an advocacy campaign to educate the public about the condition. Contact via email at [info@somalican.org](mailto:info@somalican.org) to join the global movement to improve the condition of people with Albinism.

*Reprint from SomaliCAN Outreach Newsletter (December, 2014)*

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To commemorate and celebrate the contributions to our nation made by people of African descent, American historian Carter G. Woodson established Black History Week. The first celebration occurred on Feb. 12, 1926. For many years, the second week of February was set aside for this celebration to coincide with the birthdays of abolitionist/ editor Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. In 1976, as part of the nation's bicentennial, the week was expanded into Black History Month. Each year, U.S. presidents proclaim February as National African-American History Month.



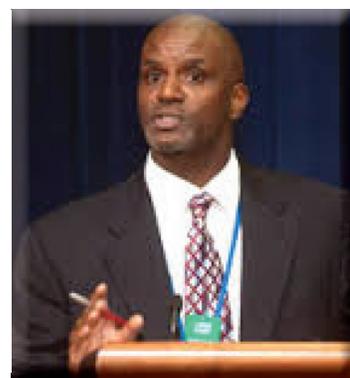
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(AIDD) for his leadership and contributions on behalf of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) provides financial and leadership support to organizations in every state and territory in the United States to ensure that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families can fully participate in and contribute to all aspects of community life.

Bishop was appointed Administrator in March, 2014 after having serving as Acting Commissioner, when his predecessor, Sharon Lewis, took on the roles of deputy administrator of ACL and disability policy advisor to Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius.

"It is has been a pleasure working with Aaron during his time as Acting Commissioner. By making his appointment permanent, he will be able to continue to



**Aaron Bishop**  
Commissioner, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

focus on directing the policy and day-to-day operations of AIDD with and on behalf of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the country," said Kathy Greenlee, Administration for Community Living Administrator. She further added, "With Aaron's leadership, in collaboration with our partners in the Developmental Disabilities Network, we will continue to build momentum on these critical issues, especially in the areas of self-advocacy, access to community supports, diversity,

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and youth transitions.”  
Mr. Bishop has almost 20 years of experience working with and for individuals with disabilities in both the direct practice and public policy sectors. He was the Executive Director of the National Council on Disability from November 2010 until February 2013. In 2006, Bishop received a Kennedy Foundation Public Policy Fellowship to work on federal disability policy and legislation for the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

Bishop’s previous experience also includes serving as the Project Coordinator for the Waisman Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, where he managed projects that advanced the rights of individuals with disabilities. He also served as the Site Coordinator and Director of Technical Assistance for the National Service Inclusion Project for the Association of University Centers on Disabilities. Bishop received his Master of Science in Social Work degree,

with an emphasis in public policy, and two Bachelor of Science in Natural Sciences degrees from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He was also the recipient of the Wisconsin Alumni Association’s Forward Under 40 award in 2010, given to alumni who make an impact on the world by living the Wisconsin Idea.



### Did You Know?

**“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” -- Harriet Tubman**

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## Nominate

### Nomination Process Now Open Ohio's Excellence in Disability Inclusion Awards Deadline February 28, 2015



WrightChoice, Inc. will celebrate this year's 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by hosting Ohio's Excellence in Disability Inclusion Awards Luncheon presented by Nationwide. As a workforce development organization, WrightChoice, Inc., urges the business community to take a moment to celebrate colleagues or co-workers who are responsible for creating an atmosphere inclusive of people with disabilities.

Award categories include **Allies for Inclusion, Exemplary Manager and Full Circle Branding Award**. Nominate a person who has lead internal efforts for disability inclusion; a manager who has demonstrated leadership by hiring people with disabilities on their team; or a company that has demonstrated best practices by including people with disabilities in their communications and marketing strategies thus strengthening its corporate brand and overall image in the community.

*"The 25th anniversary of the ADA is the perfect time to unveil these phenomenal awards. Employers and co-workers will be able to demonstrate their commitment to inclusion and the employment of individuals with disabilities. This shows that they, as well as their company, are fully committed to embracing the ADA," stated Tanya Fernandez-Mote, WrightChoice Board Chair.*

The selection committee will determine the finalist and present the awards on April 9th at the Ohio's Excellence in Disability Inclusion Awards Luncheon.

**Nominations due by February 28. All submissions should be sent to [nominations@wrightchoice.org](mailto:nominations@wrightchoice.org).**

For more information or sponsorship opportunities contact

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The purpose of "Reach Out" e-Diversity newsletter is to promote interagency collaboration and coordination that result in agencies providing culturally competent services to the unserved/underserved populations in Ohio



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Ohio's Excellence in Disability Inclusion Awards Luncheon  
*Presented by Nationwide*

Moving from Effort  
**to Excellence**

Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

*Save The Date*  
**APRIL 9TH, 2015**

The Boat House at Confluence Park  
679 West Spring Street  
Columbus, OH

*Keynote Speaker*

Josh Bleill, Indianapolis Colts  
Community spokesperson,  
disabled veteran, motivational  
speaker and author



Nationwide®  
is on your side

**ADA**  
**25**

The luncheon will highlight companies and their internal allies who are intentionally moving the disability inclusion agenda forward. Proceeds from this event will benefit WrightChoice, Inc., a workforce development organization designed to bridge the education-to-workforce gap by creating opportunities for students with disabilities and other underrepresented populations.

For additional information contact WrightChoice, Inc. 614-802-2364 or visit [www.wrightchoice.org](http://www.wrightchoice.org)  
Purchase tickets at [ada25awardsluncheon.eventbrite.com](http://ada25awardsluncheon.eventbrite.com)

