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The Senate Select Committee on Autism & Related Disorders Informational Hearing (April 13, 2010)

Preliminary Autism Taskforce Recommendations Related to the **Training and Employment** for Individuals with Autism Spectrum & Related Disorders

Overarching Problems & Challenges:

1. The Stigma Towards Employees with Developmental Disabilities:

A significant number of businesses and other organizations are misinformed as to the capabilities and work potential of individuals with developmental disabilities. Regrettably, discrimination in the workplace (some of which may be unintended) persists towards these individuals. Therefore, the Statewide Coordinating Council of Autism Taskforces (Council) recommends exploring the following:

- a. Providing appropriate and accurate information related to employment issues. There are misconceptions related to the employment of individuals with ASD and other disabilities such as a higher rate of absenteeism; more risks of injury; and a greater exposure to workman's compensation liability. Further, some consumers and their families are also misinformed as to employment-related issues (i.e. inevitable loss of resources and medical benefits if they are employed.) Therefore, the Council recommends exploring the use of existing resources, and partnering with organizations such as Workforce Investment Boards, Regional Occupational Programs, and the Department of Rehabilitation, to provide accurate information to businesses and to consumer on these issues.
- b. Implementing an anti-stigma informational program in K-12 Schools (initially as a pilot program) to inform teachers, principals, school administrators, and other school professionals and paraprofessionals about the potential of

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individuals with ASD. Further, this program would provide information and resources to identify and to address “bullying” and other anti-social behaviors that may directed against students with ASD.

- c. Implementing a Stop the R Word Campaign.
Initiate a statewide program that underscores the offensive nature of the word “retard”. We avoid using many words that denigrate individuals based on their ethnicity, culture, background, religion, sexual orientation and other factors. These considerations should be extended to individuals with developmental disabilities. A voluntary media campaign to educate Californians to avoid using the “R” word would be an important step in underscoring that individuals with developmental disabilities can be valuable employees.
- d. Promoting Mentoring and Volunteerism. Request elected officials to include at least one individual with a developmental disability as part of their staff as either a paid employee or as an uncompensated “intern/volunteer.” Evaluate what steps the Dept. of Rehabilitation is taking to promote the capabilities and strengths of individuals with developmental disabilities

2. Lack of incentives to hire individuals with developmental disabilities

- a. Establishing Excellence in Employment Awards that will identify and recognize business and organizations that provide leadership in the employment of Individuals with ASD and other disabilities.
- b. Developing “Targeted Consumer Supports” that would provide endorsement and promote supporting organizations and individuals that are employing individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities. Such actions would be a positive step in acknowledging the positive contributions that individuals with disabilities can provide to our economic growth. It would also have a direct economic benefit and provide economic incentives to those companies that are committed to the employment of individuals with developmental disabilities. These strategies may include social networking outreach and viral marketing approach.

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3. Lack of supports and funding for “micro-enterprises” and other small business endeavors that could employ individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities.
 - a. Partnering with Local Chambers of Commerce:
Explore possible partnerships with local chambers of commerce. For example, families and organizations that support individuals with developmental disabilities could partner with start-up firms and micro-enterprises in formulating business plans that would include the employment of individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities.
 - b. Clarifying Pre-Tax Private Savings Accounts:
Explore whether “529 funds” (pre-tax college fund accounts) could be used to achieve vocational and career goals for individuals with developmental disabilities. Federal legislation (HR 1205), that would create these accounts, has been introduced. Some states (i.e. Florida) also have comparable statutes.
 - c. Exploring applicability of Federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Funds. Determining whether WIA funds that are distributed to Workforce Investment Boards could be used to support micro-enterprises and other activities that could provide employment for individuals with developmental disabilities. Possible partnerships and collaboration with community colleges could also be considered.

4. Inadequate Coordination and Integration of Employment Support Services:
 - a. Establishing regional “one stop employment clearing house” programs.
Some business report that they have been overwhelmed by job applicants, and their representatives, who have a developmental disability. Often these job applicants (that may include service providers, consumers and their families, advocates, and other stakeholders) provide inadequate information about the capabilities of the applicant and/or the types of job supports/accommodations that should be available. A pilot program to establish a “one-stop” information and resource center, in partnership with a community college, should be considered. This center,

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which could exist on a secure web site, could provide information as to the regional availability of these jobs, as well as potential list of applicants, volunteers, resources, and supports. The community college could also explore a vocational training program as well as exploring establishing a “job coach” curriculum that could provide an Associate Arts Degree in Vocational Training & Employment Supports. An individual with this background might be of possible assistance in improving the productivity to an array of businesses and organizations in addition to being job coach for an individual with a developmental disability.