

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 2, 2025

The Honorable Lori Chavez-DeRemer
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington DC, 20210

Re: Proposed Rule on Modifications to the Regulations Implementing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended, RIN 1250-AA18

Dear Secretary Chavez-DeRemer:

We write to oppose the proposed rule that would upend the requirements for federal contractors in the hiring and advancement of employment of workers with disabilities.

Since 1973, Congress has required federal contractors to take affirmative steps to include people with disabilities in their workforce under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 503). Since the Department of Labor issued updated implementing regulations through its 2013 rulemaking, federal contractors have been able to better demonstrate progress. As a part of the rule, contractors can invite applicants and employees to voluntarily self-identify as having disabilities and collect and track this data to help support the goal of contractors having workers with disabilities comprise seven percent of their workforce. The Department of Labor has been crystal clear that the seven percent goal is not a quota or a requirement. Without such an aspirational goal, however, contractors have no meaningful benchmark against which to demonstrate that they are making sufficient progress to comply with Section 503.

There are more than 70 million adults in the United States that have a disability. There is evidence to show that existing DOL requirements have bolstered the representation of individuals with disabilities in our workforce. The employment-to-population ratio for people with disabilities increased over 11 percentage points from 2014 to 2023. The employment-to-population ratio and the labor force participation rate for people with disabilities in 2023 reached their highest levels yet. Further, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities in 2023 was at an all-time low. If your proposed rule is finalized, it will only hinder these gains in disability employment. At a time when workforce shortages are persistent across industries, we should be doing all we can to increase the pool of skilled workers. As you know, people with disabilities have the lowest employment rates of any group tracked by your Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Congress's directives in Section 503 are an important tool to address that problem. There are millions of Americans with disabilities who want to work, contribute to the economy, and provide for themselves – we should support them in doing so, not make it harder.

Further, the proposed rule continues to peddle this administration's attacks on "illegal" diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. Disability-based affirmative action is not illegal. Congress requires it explicitly in Section 503. This proposed rule comes on the heels of the administrations' attacks on federal contractor hiring through its rescission of Executive Order 11246 and the dismantling of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs.

It is needless and detrimental to undermine the proven efforts in federal contractors' hiring, retention and promotion efforts of workers with disabilities. The existing rule has demonstrated clear success and has stood through both Democratic and Republican administrations. This proposed rule would senselessly

curtail employment opportunities for workers with disabilities. We oppose the proposed rule and urge you to withdraw it immediately.

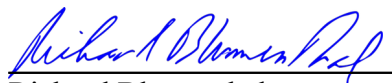
Sincerely,



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



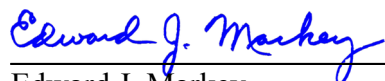
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



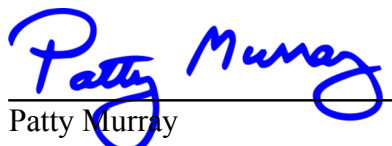
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator




Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator