



**Self-Advocacy Association of New York State
Disabilities and Employment Joint Budget Hearing
Testimony**

May 6, 2025

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the critical gaps that continue to exist in employment opportunities and supports for people with disabilities. We often speak about the pathway to employment but too often this pathway leads to a dead end for many people with disabilities.

Many of the current programs and supports focus on placing people in a job in short term supports without looking at how a person sustains a job throughout their life. Instead of looking at a person's skill, we often try to fit people in boxes by putting them in programs like pre-voc. which seem to require that they prove they are ready for a job. People are often offered volunteer opportunities that don't lead to paid work. Volunteering is important but shouldn't be a substitute for paid work if that is what the person desires. It is important to recognize that volunteerism and pre-vocational programs should be bridges to employment, yet we often see people in these programs for years, even decades. It is not uncommon that some people in these programs never find paid employment.

Employment support should not be a one sizes fits all. I believe we should also strengthen and expand customized employment opportunities. Customized employment approaches like "job carving" recognize that employment should be built around an individual's unique strengths, interests, and support needs while also meeting the needs of employers.

We need greater investment building systems that make employment flexible, accessible and effective.

We need systems that support a person's skills, interest and abilities, long-term growth and success. Getting someone into a job is important—but it is only the beginning. True inclusion means providing ongoing support for job retention, career advancement, skill development, and career transitions and retirement.

Another significant barrier is navigating Social Security benefits. The systems surrounding programs like SSI and SSDI are often difficult to understand.

People are often afraid to accept a job, work more hours, or pursue promotions because they are afraid of losing their benefits. In some cases, strict income and asset limits create real barriers to growth.

Instead of encouraging employment, these systems can unintentionally discourage it. We need more access to benefits counseling, and policies that allow people to work, earn, and save without fear of losing essential supports.

We need supports that offer growth and sustainability

- Vocational programs that lead to paid jobs
- Expanded customized employment services
- Invest in long-term employment supports that follow individuals throughout their careers, not just during initial job placement.
- Expanded access to benefits counseling.
- Promote policies that value career development, advancement, and retention

It's important to recognize that focusing on fundamental supports and services is essential to people with disabilities being successfully employed. We need a stable direct support, and vocational support workforce, quality transportation and accessible housing opportunities. For those of us who rely on adaptive equipment such as wheelchairs and other mobility devices, we need reliable equipment which can be repaired and replaced in a timely manner. We also need better access to quality education both at the primary and secondary education levels.

We also need more of programs like OPWDD's Employability which educate employers about the benefits of employing workers with disabilities because many employers still lack an understanding of how to accommodate workers with disabilities and in some cases are simply not comfortable with people with disabilities and need better education.

Staffing crisis, education opportunities and employers understanding of accommodations.

Employment should not be a box to check. It should be a lifelong journey supported by systems that recognize the full potential of people with disabilities.

Inclusion in the workforce means more than being present. It means being valued, supported, compensated, and given opportunities to grow at every stage of a career and throughout our life. It is important to recognize that a job is not just a job, it is a means of building meaningful relationships, being part of a community and experiencing personal growth, dignity and pride.

About SANYS

SANYS is an organization founded by people with Developmental Disabilities for people with Developmental Disabilities. We have been “Speaking Up for Ourselves and Others” for over 30 years.

The above statements represent views of the Board of Directors and Members of the SANYS. For more information, or to schedule a meeting or visit, please contact: Arnold Ackerley, Administrative Director at sandrews@sanys.org or (518) 603-7941.