



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SURVEY SHOWS GREATER ACCEPTANCE, CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYING  
PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES**

**Private Sector and Individuals, Along with the Federal Government and Nonprofits,  
Have Important Roles to Play**

*New AbilityOne 75th Anniversary Website Now Available*

**WASHINGTON, DC**, November 28, 2012 – According to a survey released today by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™, Americans have growing confidence in the work capabilities of people who are blind or have significant disabilities, and they support programs such as the AbilityOne® Program even more strongly than results revealed in a similar study conducted in 2009.

Celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, the AbilityOne Program is a public-private partnership through which community-based nonprofit agencies training people who are blind or have a significant disability can develop and deliver products and services for the U.S. government. More than nine out of every 10 Americans believe the Federal Government should support employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

In this year's study, nearly half of all (48 percent) respondents reported knowing a family member, friend, neighbor or co-worker who is blind or has significant disabilities. Survey respondents resoundingly affirmed the importance of across-the-board support for the AbilityOne Program and its mission. The study also reveals a growing awareness of both general and employment-specific challenges and opportunities for Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities.

“As we start our year-long 75th anniversary celebration and awareness campaign, we are using this survey to increase the American public's awareness of the AbilityOne Program. We ask that the private sector join government and nonprofit communities to support the AbilityOne Program and its mission by employing these very capable individuals,” said J. Anthony Poleo, Chairperson, U.S. AbilityOne Commission. “Awareness and education are fundamental precursors to shifting the employment figures for these highly capable yet chronically underemployed individuals in a positive and meaningful way.”

In fact, the unemployment rate for working-age persons who are blind or have a disability is disproportionately high, and fewer than 32 percent participate in the labor force at all, compared to nearly 77 percent of their peers who are not blind or have a disability.

The national survey, conducted in October, polled 1,000 Americans, 18 and older, regarding their attitudes and views on the capabilities of people who are blind or have significant disabilities to create quality products and services.

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More specifically, highlights of this year's survey include:

- *Major jump in highest level of comfort with private sector hiring of individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities.*
  - 64 percent (versus 52 percent in 2009) reported they were *very comfortable* with business in general, and their company in particular, hiring a person who is blind or has other severe disabilities.
- *Significant jump in highest level of confidence in work products of Americans who are blind or have severe disabilities.*
  - 61 percent (compared to 52 percent in 2009) reported they were *very comfortable* with the abilities of people who are blind or have other severe disabilities to make quality products for the government and the military. Likewise 62 percent (versus 52 percent in 2009) reported being *very comfortable* with government purchasing products and services made by people with disabilities.
- *Increased acceptance among Americans that people who are blind or have other severe disabilities are capable of producing quality products and services.*
  - 84 percent (versus 78 percent in 2009) said they were comfortable with the abilities of people who are blind or have other severe disabilities to make quality products and services for the government and military.
  - Additionally, nearly nine in 10 people surveyed (87 percent) said they were comfortable with the government purchasing products and services made and sold by people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.
- *Across-the-board participation is essential and the degree of support is strengthening.* More than nine in 10 affirmed it is important for each of four sectors – individuals, businesses and the private sector, government and the armed forces, and nonprofits/civic organizations/schools/other community groups– to support the AbilityOne Program and its mission. Further, there was a significant increase in the *strength of belief* that individuals and the private sector should support employment opportunities for people who are blind or have severe disabilities:
  - 58 percent say it's *very important* for individuals to support AbilityOne and its mission, up from 41 percent in 2009.
  - 62 percent say it's *very important* for businesses and the private sector to support AbilityOne and its mission, up from 56 percent in 2009.
- *Growing awareness of challenges, opportunities, and resources for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.*
  - 50 percent (vs. 37 percent in 2009) reported being knowledgeable of the general challenges and opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities;
  - 45 percent (vs. 28 percent in 2009) were knowledgeable of the employment challenges and opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities, and
  - 38 percent were knowledgeable of the private sector and the public sector resources available to people who are blind or have other severe disabilities (versus 24 percent and 27 percent, respectively, in 2009).

## **75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Website Launched**

As part of AbilityOne's year-long 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and awareness campaign, which began last month, the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™ launched a website ([www.abilityone.gov/75](http://www.abilityone.gov/75)) where visitors can learn about the history, growth and success of the AbilityOne Program. "Through the site we hope to open even more doors for individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities, gain new customers and partners, and inspire others to replicate and help evolve the AbilityOne model," added Poleo.

**About AbilityOne:**

For 75 years, the AbilityOne® Program has created employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. Today, AbilityOne is the single largest source of training and jobs for people who are blind or have significant disabilities, employing more than 50,000 individuals. Created by Congress in 1938 through the Wagner-O'Day Act and expanded in 1971 as the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act, the AbilityOne Program delivers an increasingly diverse array of quality products and services to the Federal marketplace – including SKILCRAFT® office products and medical supplies as well as administrative, help desk, contact center, contract management, custodial, document management, total facilities management, fleet management, food service management, hospitality, grounds maintenance and supply chain management services – provided by Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities, including veterans and wounded warriors.

The AbilityOne Program is a coordinated effort on behalf of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH – Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities. Through the AbilityOne Program, people who are blind or have significant disabilities have greater financial and personal independence, the opportunity to enjoy full participation in their communities, and can market their AbilityOne skills and experiences into other public and private sector jobs. AbilityOne – It Works! For more information about the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and AbilityOne, please visit [www.abilityone.gov/75](http://www.abilityone.gov/75).

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