

**Committee for Purchase From People
Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Committee Approves Quality Work Environment Initiative

Washington, DC, January 15, 2009 — The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (the Committee) has unanimously approved a new policy on Best Practices for a Quality Work Environment. It provides guidance that will involve the over 600 nonprofit employers participating in the AbilityOne Program, and it will result in the identification of state-of-the art best practices for the program’s workforce of over 42,000.

The Committee is an independent federal agency that administers the AbilityOne Program and is led by 15 Presidential appointees. The program uses the federal procurement system to create jobs for people who are blind or severely disabled.

Formally ratified by the Committee’s Presidentially appointed members on January 8, 2009, the policy was spearheaded by the agency’s Subcommittee on Communications and Customer Satisfaction, chaired by Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy Neil Romano. To develop it, Mr. Romano and Subcommittee members James Omvig and Kathleen James collaborated closely with the Committee’s Chairperson, Andrew Houghton, and its two central nonprofit agencies, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH (serving people with a range of severe disabilities).

“Chairman Romano and his subcommittee members have initiated a collaborative process that will lead us in a new and innovative direction - one that will open the doors of opportunity wider for Americans who are blind or severely disabled,” said Committee Chairman Andrew Houghton.

At the core of the policy initiative are three guiding principles reflective of AbilityOne’s vision, which is to enable all people who are blind or have other severe disabilities to achieve their maximum employment potential. These principles—which broadly state that AbilityOne workers should be provided competitive wages, a clear career path and ongoing training—will now serve as a framework for the development of best practice standards for the more than 600 nonprofit agencies across the nation that participate in the AbilityOne Program. As part of this process, NIB and NISH will begin to identify and create best practices, and assist their associated nonprofit agencies to develop Quality Work Environment Business Plans that reflect the principles and include a self-certification program based on them.

In voting to approve the recommendations set forth in the Policy on Best Practices for a Quality Work Environment, Committee members have embarked on a significant new course for the AbilityOne Program, one that further advances America's promise of equal opportunity for all citizens, including those with disabilities. More information about the policy, including frequently asked questions, is available on the Committee's web site at www.abilityone.gov.

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The AbilityOne Program is the largest single source of employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities in the United States. The Committee determines which products and services purchased by the federal government must be procured from AbilityOne-participating nonprofit agencies; and it establishes the fair market prices for these products and services, and subsequent revisions as appropriate. In assisting the federal government in expanding its AbilityOne procurement, the Committee has designated more than 400 authorized distributors. The Committee is comprised of 15 Presidential appointees, with 11 representing federal agencies, and four serving as private citizens who are knowledgeable about the obstacles to employment of people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.