

U.S. AbilityOne Commission
Minutes – Quarterly Public Meeting
October 7, 2021
1:00 – 4:00 p.m. ET

I. Call to Order

Commission Chairperson Jeffrey Koses called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. ET. He welcomed the more than 300 registered attendees on the Zoom call and said this would be the Commission’s first meeting with the new private citizen members of the Commission. Introductions of Commission members and staff followed.

II. Consideration of Minutes

Mr. Koses asked for any corrections to the July 8, 2021, Commission public meeting minutes. Minor typographical errors and technical edits were identified. Ms. Chai Feldblum, Vice Chairperson, made a motion that the minutes be adopted with the proposed changes. Her motion received a second from Mr. Gabriel Cazares, private citizen member. The minutes were unanimously approved.

III. Chairperson’s Remarks

Mr. Koses said the first half of the meeting would focus on various topics of discussion, and the second half would engage the public, focusing on thoughts, ideas and best practices to modernize AbilityOne employment.

Mr. Koses discussed Executive Order 14042, “Ensuring Adequate COVID Safety Protocols for Federal Contractors.” This EO created a mandate for certain federal contractor employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19. (Additional guidance is available on the [Safer Federal Workforce](#) website).

IV. New Private Citizen Appointees to the Commission – Introductions

Chairperson Koses introduced the four new private citizen members appointed effective July 31, 2021, who then introduced themselves as follows:

Ms. Chai Feldblum, civil rights consultant, elected Commission Vice Chairperson on September 2, 2021

- National expert in disability law and employment.
- Leads Commission's Regulations Subcommittee.
- Started legal career at the American Civil Liberties Union.
- Led drafting and negotiations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.
- Former Georgetown University Law School professor who ran legislation clinic representing nonprofit organizations. Worked primarily on social justice and employment issues, including those related to people with disabilities.
- Worked on drafting and negotiating the ADA Amendments Act of 2008.
- Former Commissioner at Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).
- Former partner at Morgan Lewis law firm in Washington, DC, helping employers create diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

Ms. Feldblum said she has three goals as a Commission member:

- First, help make AbilityOne Program as effective as possible in achieving its objective of providing good jobs for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.
- Second, help analyze and revise the AbilityOne Program's current legal structure to provide the most flexibility to bring the Program into alignment with current disability policy while achieving the Program's primary goals.
- Third, collectively use the Commission's expertise to leverage the power of federal contracting to increase employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

Mr. Bryan Bashin, CEO, LightHouse for the Blind, San Francisco, California

- Thanked Acting Executive Director Kimberly Zeich for leadership in improving accessibility.
- 12 years as LightHouse CEO. Background includes television, radio and print journalism; leading several nonprofit agencies; and serving in Rehabilitation Services Administration at the U.S. Department of Education.
- There are about 1.5 million blind Americans, of which about 400,000 are working age and want to work but are currently unemployed.
- After 80 years of the JWOD (Javits-Wagner-O'Day) Act, the AbilityOne Program employs only about one percent of the 1.5 million Americans who are blind.

- Joined Commission to make improvements and is optimistic that he can contribute to the modernization of processes and increase employment.

Ms. Chris Brandt, CEO of AtWork!, Bellevue, Washington

- 15 years as CEO of AtWork!, a small nonprofit agency.
- Working on behalf of people with disabilities for more than 48 years.
- Agreed to serve on Commission to further equity and justice for people with significant disabilities.
- Believes federal government provides an opportunity and an avenue for people with significant disabilities to succeed and have a career path to escape the poverty that being born with a disability often guarantees.
- Eager to share her experiences to help people obtain competitive integrated employment.
- Believes she can help to effect positive change within the contracting sector and beyond with the Biden Administration's commitment to providing equity for people with disabilities.

Mr. Gabe Cazares, Director, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Houston, Texas

- Spent almost a decade of his professional career advancing the rights of people who are blind or have other disabilities.
- Believes employment landscape for people with disabilities has changed since the inception of the AbilityOne Program in 1938, and that it is important to use every level of government to ensure that people with disabilities who want to work can find work.
- Mr. Cazares said that, as a queer Latino, he believes it is important that the Commission ensure that the AbilityOne Program supports all the members of the disability community, particularly those who are part of marginalized communities and have been historically left behind.

V. Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: "Prohibition on the Payment of Subminimum Wages Under 14(c) Certificates as a Qualification for Participation as a Nonprofit Agency Under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program"

A pre-publication version overview of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) was posted on the Commission's [website](#) before the public meeting. Ms. Feldblum provided an overview and stated the following:

- Thanked Mr. Koses for his leadership of a Commission composed of people who understand the procurement process as well as those who bring knowledge of disability rights.
- Representatives from the Department of Labor and Department of Education were engaged on the proposed rule.

- NPRM Federal Register notice scheduled for publication on October 12, 2021.
- Commission proposes to add a new qualification requirement for nonprofit agencies (NPAs) to enter the AbilityOne Program. The NPA must certify that it will not use 14(c) certificates in paying employees on AbilityOne contracts.
- The rule does not address non-AbilityOne contracts. NPAs cannot use 14(c) certificates to pay subminimum wages on new or renewed contracts within the AbilityOne Program. (For details on the proposed rule, see the [Federal Register notice](#)).
- Noted that Executive Order 14026 (“Increasing the Minimum Wage for Federal Contractors,” April 27, 2021) will govern existing AbilityOne service contracts but not product contracts.
- Under EO 14026, contractors must pay \$15 an hour after January 2022. The EO will apply even for extensions of existing contracts pursuant to an option, so it is stricter than the Commission’s proposed rule.
- On AbilityOne contracts, NPAs must pay federal minimum or state minimum wage, and discontinue 14(c) certificates.
- NPAs required by law to pay a prevailing wage that is higher than the minimum wage will continue to be required to do so.
- There is a growing call to phase out all 14(c) certificates in agreement with the comprehensive analysis done by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- A committee established pursuant to WIOA had recommended a full phaseout of 14(c). Regarding AbilityOne contracts, the WIOA report called for an immediate prohibition on the use of 14(c) certificates and had no exceptions.

- Commission is seeking public comments about the rule in four areas:
 - 1) Renewals of contracts.
 - 2) Whether the rule should apply to contract extensions pursuant to the exercise of options.
 - 3) Potential impact on eligibility for Medicaid.
 - 4) Timing of stopping use of 14(c) certificates.

- In 2019, Commission sent a letter to SourceAmerica asking it to work with NPAs to voluntarily stop use of 14(c) certificates.
- Ms. Feldblum asked Richard Belden, Acting President and CEO of SourceAmerica, to address whether people who transitioned out of 14(c) lost their jobs or Medicaid eligibility; share data; and describe how SourceAmerica has counseled and supported the NPAs on this issue.
- NPRM comment period is essential to avert any possible adverse consequences – “we want to get this right.”
- Very happy to see so many attendees from the disability community.
- The work of people with disabilities should be valued the same as people who do not have disabilities.

VI. SourceAmerica 14(c) Transition Plan Update

Mr. Richard Belden, Acting President and CEO, SourceAmerica, provided the following update on SourceAmerica's 14(c) Transition Plan and Program:

- SourceAmerica Board of Directors adopted their formal position on 14(c) in March 2019. Board supports NPAs in reducing the use of special minimum wage certificates through access to financial and technical resources and shared learning experiences.
- 36 NPAs are enrolled in utilizing various services, and 24 are receiving Productivity Engineering support.
- 17 different organizations are receiving Pathways Program support, a multi-year program focused on custom employment and lessons learned associated with fitting the job to the individual.
- SourceAmerica engaged two recently retired, very successful and well-respected NPA CEOs who were leaders in their organizations' 14(c) transition. SourceAmerica has engaged these two CEOs, with other CEOs, to offer expert consulting services to assist with 14(c) transitions and build understanding of the processes and some of the pitfalls.
- A little over \$600,000 in grant funding has been awarded to the NPAs, and another \$200,000 is in the queue to support educational opportunities for individuals or people providing services to individuals working under 14(c).
- Significant progress has been made. He said in mid-2019 there were about 200 NPAs using 14(c) certificates on AbilityOne programs, and that number is now down to 160. Mr. Belden showed a graph with the data showing the 14(c) trends over the past few years, including the number of individuals that were paid minimum wage. He said although great progress has happened, there is still a lot of work to do.

In response to Ms. Feldblum's question about the number of individuals who no longer receive subminimum wages, Mr. Belden said SourceAmerica has focused on whether individuals continued working or transferred to a day program. Mr. Belden said SourceAmerica would spend more time collecting data on possible issues with Medicare and SSI. Mr. Belden said Executive Order 14026 raises the question of whether individuals are at risk for losing their SSI benefits. He said the information will be provided as part of comments into the rulemaking process.

VII. Acting Executive Director's Report

Ms. Kimberly Zeich, Acting Executive Director, reported on Commission staff execution of Commission priorities, including FY 2021 achievements on:

- Advancing rulemaking process to end subminimum wages on AbilityOne contracts.
- Launching the AbilityOne Representatives (ABORs) group, its monthly meetings, and various training sessions with Federal agencies. She said this initiative promises to grow AbilityOne employment.
- Increases in number of Commission staff were made possible by increased appropriations – adding capability and capacity, and enhancing stewardship, financial management and compliance. Commission added its first Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist to the staff.
- Completing a full cycle of Enterprise Risk Management planning and strengthening internal controls due to the work of the new Chief Financial Officer, George Govan.
- Contributing to Section 898 Panel's closure of several Panel recommendations. Panel's fourth and final report is due to Congress by the end of 2021. Subsequent actions related to the Panel are expected.
- Increasing transparency and communication through a variety of channels. Commission report to the President submitted in March was well received. Attendance continues to increase at the Commission's quarterly virtual public meetings, which include an interactive public component.
- Enhancing collaboration with federal agency partners through working groups and written agreements. Commission participates in the Interagency Disability Employment Working Group and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) that is specific to how AbilityOne and RSA work together when contract opportunities for dining facilities are identified. Also, the Commission has been working with GSA to improve business processes.
- Commission has been working to fulfill requirements under the President's Executive Orders, including Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," Executive Order 14035, "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce," and Executive Order 14019 "Promoting Access to Voting."

Ms. Zeich thanked Chairperson Koses, Commission members and staff for their hard work and dedication.

Mr. Koses said the rulemaking process is tremendously important, and the comment process is impactful. Mr. Koses emphasized the importance of the public comments.

VIII. Office of Inspector General Report

Ms. Stefania Porter, Acting Inspector General, gave an overview of the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) initiatives, including the 2021 "Top Management and Performance Challenges (TMPC) Report," audit plans, the 898 Panel, and OIG's semiannual report to Congress.

Ms. Porter introduced Mr. Steven Burke, (Acting) Deputy Inspector General and head of Investigations. Ms. Porter welcomed the new private citizen Commission members and said she is looking forward to more interactions.

She recognized two former Commission members who left in July 2021: former Commission Chairperson James M. Kesteloot and former Commission Vice Chairperson Robert Kelly. She thanked them for their service and contributions to the Commission and AbilityOne Program.

Ms. Porter stated the following:

- Annual TMPC report issued in November 2020 identified eight challenges facing the Commission.
- OIG issued two-year audit plan for Commission's programs and operations for fiscal years 2020 and 2021.
- OIG audit coverage is designed on risk-based factors about the AbilityOne Program functions, operations, major activities, and Program priorities and challenges.
- An audit is defined as an independent and objective review assessing whether resources are allocated efficiently, funds spent properly, Commission goals achieved, and applicable laws, policies and regulations followed. All audits are public and published on the [OIG web page](#).
- "Audit of the Central Nonprofit Agency Selection of Nonprofit Agencies for Project Assignment and Allocation of Orders" was issued in March 2021. The report stated that the Commission follows rules and practices, but OIG identified some weaknesses and made 16 recommendations, including seven recommendations to address weaknesses in the Commission's controls over the CNAs' project distribution processes. She said the CNAs' distribution processes could be improved with updated guidance, better management, and additional oversight from the Commission.
- Performance audits are discretionary audits and include the ongoing "Audit of the AbilityOne Compliance Program," and the "Audit of the Quality of Products in Support of Meeting Government Requirements."
- Compliance audit will determine whether the compliance program has been implemented effectively to provide reasonable assurance of NPA and CNA compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
- OIG will review laws, regulations, policies and procedures applicable to the compliance program, conduct interviews with key personnel, and analyze data, reports, and other supporting documentation related to compliance reviews.

- Mandatory audits include the ongoing financial statement audit and the DATA Act compliance audit.
- Biennial audit plan was issued in June 2021 for fiscal years 2022-2023. She said OIG utilized a comprehensive risk-based methodology to inform audit planning and future engagements.
- OIG actively working as a statutory member of the 898 Panel. OIG led the Panel's IG subcommittee in collaboration with Defense Acquisition University (DAU) and completed IG recommendations including training for procurement officers about AbilityOne contracts, and continuous updating of training following the sunset of the Panel.
- Next Semiannual Report to Congress (SAR) will be issued in November 2021.

IX. Best Practices to Modernize AbilityOne Employment – Panel Discussions

The meeting included two panels addressing “Best Practices to Modernize AbilityOne Employment”:

Panel One

Mr. Bryan Bashin, private citizen member; CEO, San Francisco LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Ms. Christina Brandt, private citizen member; CEO, AtWork!, Bellevue, Washington

Mr. Jeff Dolven, President and CEO, Skookum, Bremerton, Washington

Mr. Bryan Bashin, CEO, San Francisco LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Mr. Bashin stated the following:

San Francisco LightHouse has been operating for more than 100 years as a blind employment program, beginning with making furniture for the Navy during World War I.

- About 50 percent of their workforce is blind, and 50 percent sighted.
- 75 percent of income comes from commercial contracts, and 25 percent from federal contracts.
- Best practices in specific LightHouse programs, and the organization as a whole, include:
 - LightHouse's PRIDEClean Sirkin Center: Products produced include environmentally friendly disinfectants that use the latest high-tech ionic silver compounds. Salaries paid to employees: Median salary is \$22.28 an hour, lowest salary is \$17.05 an hour. A blind chemist on staff makes \$62,000 a year. LightHouse uses profits from this program to subsidize other blindness-training programs.
 - Employee benefits and benefit-related education include a 401(k) program; a program focused on funding future college and career advancement; and presentations to employees on the ABL Act.

- Best practices related to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE):
 - AbilityOne employees are not segregated from the general LightHouse staff and participate in general staff meetings.
 - To help internal mobility, early internal postings of all LightHouse jobs are provided to all employees, providing a career path for those who want to upgrade or change jobs and stay in the organization.
 - Employees are required to check their emails daily, which helps integrate participants into the larger LightHouse.

- Lighthouse Employment Immersion Program, in existence since 2011:
 - Job seekers from all employment categories interact with other blind job seekers, and the initiative is blind-led.
 - Employment Immersion Program has a 43 percent placement rate.
 - Almost 90 percent of the funding for the Employment Immersion Program comes from private donations, charities and corporate grants.
 - Mr. Bashin said it is time to think about why this funding stems from charity while the government funds non-integrated employment. It is time to think about how the government could, instead, fund programs that have competitive results.
 - Employment Immersion Program costs about \$35,000 per placement. Were another organization to do a pilot, that would cost about \$500,000 a year.
 - Employment Immersion Program participants are linked to blind mentors (people who have been in the competitive workforce for years and even decades).
 - Emphasized that to grow employment for people who are blind, it is not enough to simply impart skills. People who are blind also need self-confidence, which can come from knowing that other blind people are doing the kind of jobs that they themselves aspire to do.
 - Employment Immersion Program has been largely on pause during the pandemic.

- Over past 10 years, LightHouse has served 311 people, 114 of whom have gotten CIE jobs.
 - All the jobs are competitive and total up to a combined salary of \$4 million a year.
 - Job titles include engineers, nurses, analysts, therapists and technicians.
 - Mr. Bashin said there are no stereotypical blind jobs.

- LightHouse program “30% & Growing” members meet socially to build confidence and awareness that competitive jobs can be done by people who are blind.
- Mr. Bashin estimates that, based on the LightHouse track record, it would cost close to \$14 million to have a robust national program producing CIE and using the talents and strengths of

NPAs and blindness agencies around the country. He believes that such a program would double the employment level currently being achieved through the current NIB system.

- Mr. Bashin invited attendees to inform the Commission members about other models and funding schemes that might contribute to competitive integrated employment for people who are blind.

Ms. Christina Brandt, private citizen member; CEO, AtWork!, Bellevue, Washington

Ms. Brandt summarized her background and career as follows:

- Inspired by her cousin Carol, who faced discrimination in the early 1970s but obtained a job in one of the country's first supported employment programs, worked for 30 years, retired with fully vested retirement benefits.

- Ms. Brandt herself began career as special education teacher in a school where students with disabilities were not integrated with other students, and helped school move towards integration.

- Worked on Lane v. Brown class action lawsuit that charged Oregon with violating the ADA and led to closure of sheltered workshops and ban of subminimum wages in Washington and Oregon.

- Currently leads AtWork!, which serves people with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- AtWork! celebrates 60th anniversary next year.

- \$7 million in annual revenue, 85 staff members, serves 450 people/year.

- Majority of income comes from mission services (i.e., supported employment).

- CIE is typically funded by vocational rehabilitation and by home- and community-based waiver services through developmental disabilities services.

- Next highest source of income is from ACE, a wholly owned subsidiary of AtWork! commercial enterprises that generates surplus, which feeds mission services.

- AbilityOne work is 17 percent of AtWork!'s income (a little over \$1 million). Other revenue includes fundraising.

- AtWork!'s annual Champions of Inclusion Breakfast celebrates employers who have done a good job with CIE.

AtWork!'s transformation:

- In 2006, AtWork! decided there was room for improvement -- closed their sheltered workshops and moved to competitive integrated employment.
 - Declared they would leave no one behind.
 - Examined whether services exemplified values of integration and equity for people with disabilities.
 - 180 people were earning subminimum wage in sheltered workshops.
 - 50 people in group employment earning sub-minimum wages in janitorial, recycling and grounds maintenance positions.
 - 10 people earning subminimum wages in supported employment.

- By 2014, AtWork! had closed their last sheltered workshop.
- On 25th anniversary of ADA in 2015, started paying every employee prevailing wage.
- Between 2006 and 2015, 170 people moved to customized jobs in the community; 5 stayed in AtWork! enterprises; 45 moved into a community inclusion program (retired); and 10 people moved away, left services or chose another provider.
- Before its transformation, AtWork! was able to serve 10 new people per year.
- Subsequently, 754 new people have been served with 635 new job starts, and 309 new business partners hired their first person with a disability.
- Average hourly wage is \$13.92; hours range from eight to 40, with average of 19.
- Revenue has grown from \$3 million to over \$7 million.
- Organization growing every year and serving more people who want to work in CIE.
- AtWork! has divested businesses that could not stand on their own paying prevailing wages.
- Added new business lines, creating customized jobs for people with I/DD and other disabilities.
- AtWork!'s Champions of Inclusion include businesses like Pump It Up and Costco.
- Small businesses from doggy daycares to donut shops, as well as local government, are also employing people with disabilities.
- AtWork! provides mentors and gives people opportunities to go into the community and discover different work environments, different businesses, different tasks.
- During pandemic, At-Work! has continued to provide discovery process through virtual environments.
- Assistive technology has been key to transformation. Organization has over half a million dollars invested in training and customized and supported employment. She thanked Mr. Dolven for his help.

- Ms. Brandt believes if sheltered workshops close and wages increase, there could be more integrated opportunities.
- Would prove people with disabilities are ready for community employment.
- Students are transitioning from high school straight into community jobs that match their skills, receiving training and support on-the-job.
- Ms. Brandt said there are more opportunities for a diverse workforce that includes all abilities and provides employees with the opportunity to make friends and build relationships.
- Spoke briefly about H.R. 2373 (“Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act”).
- Emphasized need to fix the SSI cliff and reasons people accept low pay or limit hours, and noted that there is legislation addressing these problems.
- She hopes that, with more innovation, the Commission will work to make sure that people with disabilities secure good jobs.
- She hopes the federal government becomes a model employer.

Mr. Jeff Dolven, President and CEO, Skookum, Bremerton, Washington

Mr. Dolven shared best practices around AbilityOne employment, as follows:

- Disability rights are human rights, and people with disabilities deserve equal access to economic opportunities.
- Improvement and expansion of opportunities are needed – both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- Modernization is putting values into action.
- For people to make more money, they need to be more skilled.
- To change the lives of people with disabilities, the focus should be on skills development and bringing more vocational specialists in to look for opportunities to develop skills in the employees.
- Mr. Dolven said he views it as a triangle: education, experience and exposure.
- Skookum focuses on job shadowing and hands-on learning. He shared a story about a young man with extensive learning disabilities. Skookum gave him an opportunity to work in a maintenance mechanic position.
- In FY 2021, Skookum experienced 143 internal promotions: 97 were direct labor AbilityOne employees with disabilities and, of those, 49 were veterans.
- 94 employees transitioned out of Skookum and into community employment, where they are now earning more money. Five employees left to return to school full time.
- Skookum celebrates advancement of employees through education and training.
- Vocational specialists check in with every employee twice a year and discuss their career goals.
- Skookum assists employees with resume writing, interviewing techniques, and job searches that intersect with employees’ aspirations and values.

- Skookum's vocational specialists and tuition assistance program are vital to the success of their employees.
- The challenge for any contractor is to match the abilities of employees with the mission needs of the customer.
- Skookum first looks at the abilities of employees and determines which segment of the disability population (e.g., veterans or people who are deaf) is a good fit with the available job opportunities.
- When abilities are matched with choice and the right accommodations, the people become a very high performing team.

Panel Two

Mr. Michael Monteferrante, President and CEO of Envision in Wichita, Kansas

Mr. Bill Hudson, former CEO of LC Industries in Durham, North Carolina, and current President of LC Industries' Foundation

Kevin Lynch, President and CEO, National Industries for the Blind (NIB), Alexandria, Virginia

Reginald Hughes, Executive Director, Palmetto Goodwill Services, North Charleston, South Carolina

Mr. Michael Monteferrante, President and CEO of Envision in Wichita, Kansas

Mr. Bill Hudson, former CEO of LC Industries in Durham, North Carolina, and current President of LC Industries' Foundation

- Mr. Monteferrante shared some best practices about modernizing AbilityOne employment. Mr. Monteferrante has worked at Envision for 16 years. Mr. Hudson has worked at LC Industries (LCI) for 50 years. Envision and LCI began in the 1930s. Envision and LCI have a combined total of more than 1,300 employees, of which over 675 employees are blind or visually impaired.
- Mr. Hudson contacted Mr. Monteferrante about 5 years ago and described his vision for using technology to help advance their employees. Together they developed the Envision Workforce Innovation Center and invested in developing training programs to enable people who are blind to become more involved in technology.
- "At some point in time, we will have people who are blind at the forefront of technology in this world," Mr. Hudson said. He added that, while there is more to do, they are making progress.
- Mr. Monteferrante said one of the first steps in the project had been to call Mr. Kevin Lynch, President and CEO, National Industries for the Blind (NIB), who gave his full support. Mr. Monteferrante and Mr. Hudson also worked closely with Reinhard Mabry, President and CEO, Alphapointe; the Commission; and others, focusing on training individuals working in direct labor jobs to advance to professional knowledge-based jobs in conjunction with AbilityOne.

Former Commission Chairperson Tom Robinson, former Commission Executive Director Tina Ballard, and Ms. Zeich visited the center in Wichita.

- Mr. Monteferrante said they had great success with Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Three years later, there are great examples of people who are blind who have advanced through this training program and are now Federal employees working in the acquisition career field. He said there has been success in North Carolina, Texas, and Kansas, and they hope to expand to more states. Among the success stories: The customer service groups at both Envision and LCI are now 100% blind or visually impaired.

- Mr. Monteferrante said their most recent initiative, called the Envision College Success Program, focuses on blind and visually impaired individuals in college. In the College Success Program, blind college graduates act as mentors to incoming freshmen and help them deal with adversity. He hopes to build the mentorship program up to 200 mentors.

- Mr. Monteferrante said only 13 percent of blind college students graduate from college. He hopes that those statistics will improve.

Kevin Lynch, President and CEO, National Industries for the Blind (NIB), Alexandria, Virginia

- Mr. Lynch gave a presentation on a new enterprise venture called NSITE. NSITE provides a continuum of employment services that connect employers with talented, dedicated people who are blind and visually impaired, and/or veterans, to meet their workforce needs. He said NSITE is an expansion of the successful Business Leaders Program that NIB has had since the early 2000s.

- Mr. Lynch said NSITE focuses on training and is working with Cisco to offer the first-ever Cisco Academy designed for people who are blind. After 40 weeks of intensive, instructor-led training, the participants become Cisco Certified Network Associates. Mr. Lynch said the first graduation is scheduled for October 20th; the second cohort will begin in November; and a third in Spring 2022.

- Mr. Lynch discussed the NSITE job board, called NSITE Connect, which has compiled more than 200 job seeker profiles and 145 job postings from various U.S. employers. The NSITE team is engaged in job placement discussions with several national nonprofit organizations and Fortune 500 companies, including the American Red Cross, Capital One, and Amazon.

- NSITE is also working with several industrial industry associations to develop impactful workforce training courses. Mr. Lynch said this includes supply chain management. Mr. Lynch encouraged everyone to go to the website [NSITE.org](https://www.nsite.org) for more information.

- Mr. Bashin asked Mr. Lynch whether the NSITE program has stalled because there is no federal agency sponsoring the program. Mr. Lynch said that NPAs must demonstrate past performance when entering a new market such as cybersecurity. He said NIB experienced the same challenge when entering contract closeout, and that they were able to do a pilot to prove it could be successful. Mr. Lynch hopes that NIB can do something similar regarding cybersecurity and find a government agency willing to try a pilot program. Mr. Bashin encouraged any government attendees to take a possible pilot test into consideration.

Reginald Hughes, Executive Director, Palmetto Goodwill Services, North Charleston, South Carolina

- Mr. Hughes briefed the Commission on how his agency uses an American Sign Language (ASL) program to meet the needs of the AbilityOne deaf community and provide a pathway to positive employment outcomes. He stated:
- SourceAmerica data shows that approximately 1,350 individuals in the AbilityOne Program are deaf or hearing impaired (five percent of the total number of employees).
- Data does not show lack of needed resources; intentional focus on culture-building and inclusion for deaf AbilityOne employees at the NPA level; or the impact on mental health that lack of inclusion has for deaf employees.
- A year ago, the ASL program was started to provide ASL Level One and Two training.
- Mr. Hughes said he hopes to increase ASL fluency for those working on AbilityOne contracts and to build a bridge to jobs in the community. Goodwill is exploring partnership opportunities with corporate employers.
- The ASL program – which is open to all AbilityOne nonprofit agencies and to SourceAmerica – is currently in 27 states, with a goal to reach all 50 states by the end of the year. So far, 325 individuals have graduated from the program; goal is 500 by the end of the year.
- Goodwill is considering establishing a focus group to better define the needs; a feasibility study; and creating an education, outreach and training program. Mr. Hughes is planning a marketing campaign to help further the mission.
- Mr. Hughes plans to create MOUs with targeted organizations and track employment outcomes over a three-year period.
- Palmetto Goodwill is currently in conversations with Amazon to provide ASL training for supervisors and managers. Plans include a deaf engagement resource group within the NPA network to replicate what Palmetto Goodwill is currently doing.
- Referring to Mr. Hughes’s discussion of Amazon, Ms. Feldblum asked how Palmetto Goodwill had decided which corporations to reach out to about potential ASL training. Mr. Hughes said Amazon had approached him to ask if Amazon’s first line supervisors could be trained on basic ASL. Amazon heard about the ASL program through a third party.
- Mr. Hughes said if Goodwill builds a relationship with Amazon and finds success, the training could be replicated across the United States.
- Mr. Hughes said the data shows that when deaf employees feel included, their productivity goes up.

X. Recommendations for Pilot Tests to Increase Integrated Employment in the AbilityOne Program

Ms. Mary Joan (MJ) Willard, Executive Director, National Telecommuting Institute (NTI), Boston, Massachusetts

Ms. Willard presented her recommendations for pilot tests to increase integrated employment in the AbilityOne Program. Ms. Willard stated the following:

- Ms. Willard works with Ms. Becky Ogle, a disability activist, and federal procurement experts Richard Beutel and Allan Burman. She said they submitted a proposal to the Commission for a pilot program using an innovative model for achieving competitive integrated employment (CIE) within the AbilityOne Program through co-employment.
- Under co-employment, there is a Prime Contractor A who is responsible for all employees and a Prime Contractor B who is responsible for employees with severe disabilities. The employer of record issues and handles paychecks and payroll taxes, and the second employer is the common law employer responsible for the day-to-day supervision and management of the employee.
- Provided examples of what the proposed model would look like and described different scenarios. She said the skills of the employee with a disability determines their job responsibilities and wages. Ms. Willard said there is no clustering of the people with disabilities in the workforce unless their disability is obvious or unless they choose to disclose it.
- Pilot has enormous potential for expansion because there is estimated to be 3.7 million Americans working on outsourced federal contracts. She ended her presentation by saying that AbilityOne could become a mechanism by which people with severe disabilities are fully integrated into the entire workforce.

Mr. Koses said when thinking about a pilot, he thinks about something that has a defined size, scope, metrics and so forth. He asked Ms. Willard what she thinks might be an appropriate size and duration to evaluate the pilot.

Ms. Willard said there has been a particular federal agency that has shown some interest. She said she would like AbilityOne to bless the concept. She said they have already received a legal opinion from a procurement law firm, which is of the opinion that there's really no reason that co-employment cannot be used under AbilityOne. Ms. Willard has spoken to at least three lawyers and federal procurement people who verify that a prime system is used in other parts of the government. Ms. Willard hopes that there could be a pilot launch in a few months. Ms. Willard said she would like feedback from the Commission members regarding their interest and possible support.

Ms. Feldblum said she would be concerned about making sure reasonable accommodations were provided. Ms. Willard said NTI has been working with co-employment for more than 10 years, and they inform employers what accommodations are required by law.

Ms. Willard said most of their employees telework and are accommodated when taking leave for medical reasons. Most employees work part time because that's what they are able to handle with their severe physical disabilities. She added that a lot of people who live in rural areas also prefer to work from home because in many instances they do not have transportation.

Ms. Feldblum asked about other employers outside of NTI and ideas like providing job coaches as a reasonable accommodation.

Ms. Glaeser addressed chat box questions and comments from attendees, including a suggestion to hold listening sessions. Mr. Koses emphasized the importance of the pending vaccine mandate.

XI. Closing Remarks

Mr. Koses recognized the four new private citizen members and the new energy and creative ideas they bring to the Commission.

He said discussions regarding the importance of 14(c) are key to the modernization of the Program, emphasizing the importance of public comments on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and stating that the Commission is eager to receive comments that will be impactful in shaping and finalizing the rule.

Ms. Zeich emphasized the Commission's progress over the past year, and its commitment to moving forward.

Mr. Koses said he is looking forward to the OIG's Top Management and Performance Challenges report because it is a clear and helpful guide. Mr. Koses thanked everyone who gave a presentation on modernization. He said the Commission must ensure that people who are blind and disabled have access to good-paying and meaningful jobs that are fully integrated.

Mr. Koses said he looks forward to more detailed discussion regarding Ms. Willard's presentation. Mr. Koses asked attendees to provide topics for future Commission public meetings, and said it is always a good idea to listen to stakeholders.

Mr. Koses adjourned the meeting at 3:50 p.m.

List of Attendees – October 7, 2021

Commission Members

Bryan Bashin	Private citizen member
Chris Brandt	Private citizen member
Gabe Cazares	Private citizen member
Chai Feldblum	Private citizen member (Vice Chairperson)
Jeffrey Koses	U.S. General Services Administration (Chairperson)
Jennifer Sheehy	U.S. Department of Labor/ODEP
Virna Winters	U.S. Department of Commerce

Commission Nominees

Matthew Beebe	Defense Logistics Agency
Mark Bennington	U.S. Department of the Navy
Angela Billups	U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
John Cannaday	U.S. Department of the Air Force
Megan Dake	U.S. Department of the Army
Carol Dobak	U.S. Department of Education/RSA
Malcom Shorter	U.S. Department of Agriculture

Commission Staff

Priya Adipoodi
Mirza Ali
Bradley Crain
Roslyn Edson
Irene Glaeser
George Govan
Karen Guile
Shelly Hammond
Brian Hoey
Steve Jones-Ellard
Mike Jurkowski
Timi Kenealy
John Konst
Stephanie Lesko
Austine Luyegu
Martine Mewebo
Daniel Mutombo
Ricardo Newman
Vrinda Nair
Marlin Paschal
Angela Phifer
Breck Richardson
Don Rose

Vanedra Smith
Zafor Ullah
Stephanie Watson
Julia Wiggins
Wakita Wilson
Kelvin Wood
Celia Wren
Edward Yang
Kimberly Zeich

Office of Inspector General (OIG)

Kamil Ali
Steven Burke
Jessica Johnson
Stefania Pozzi Porter
Fritz Swartzbaugh
Rosario Torres
Lina Younes

National Industries for the Blind (NIB)

David Barrett
Chuck Basa
Steve Brice
Kevin Campbell
Timothy Dudley
Jason Endicott
Annelie Eyre
Shelly Foust
Sonia Francis
Vivian Fridas
Kathleen Gallagher
Amy Gray
Angela Hartley
Paul Healy
Ashley Kraus
Lakesha Larry
Luis Lebron
Kevin Lynch
Tom Mikrut
Andy Mueck
Ellen Najjar
Laura Reimers
Joyce Rey
Anne-Marie Wallace
Rick Webster

Matt Wieseler

SourceAmerica

Richard Baker
Stacy Barton
Richard Belden
Ryan Blackman
Lindsey Boyington
Heather Bushane
John Carmichael
Paul Cataldo
Catherine Chase
Cathy Cooke
Howard Cooke
Rod Conley
Mary DePrang
Diana Dougherty
Alicia Epstein
Linda Feeney
Paula Fisher
Joe Foley
Marshelle Gaspar
Micky Gazaway
Carla Gocool
Carla Goulart
Tom Hartigan
Thomas Hawkins
Corey Heritage
Ransom Holliday
George Indelli
Debbie Ignatz
Jill Johnson
Amanda King
Thomas Lanaghan
Stacey Locke
Stephanie Millian
Leslie Nelson
Jon Porter
Mickey Reyes
Karen Searles
Chris Stream
Mattie Swanson
Ellen Telander
Shari Walton
Nancy Yoder

Government Representatives

John Bagwell	General Services Administration
Dave Berthiaume	U.S. Department of Labor/ODEP
Millisa Gary	General Services Administration
Tabisa Kalisa	NASA
Roxanne Lane	U.S. Department of Agriculture
Marcelle Loveday	U.S. Department of Commerce
Amanda Maisels	U.S. Department of Justice
Bonita Miner	U.S. Department of Army
Susan Pollack	U.S. Department of Defense (OSD)
Daniel Posthumus	House Committee Education and Labor (Majority Staff)
Colton Puckett	Rep. Andy Levin's office
Karla Smith Jackson	NASA
William Sproule	U.S. Department of the Air Force
Timothy Stark	DLA
Erik Urban	U.S. Department of the Air Force
Rachel Varsanik	General Services Administration
Linda Walker	Defense Health Agency
Robert Warnick	Defense Logistics Agency
Lindsey Weinstock	U.S. Department of Justice
Amanda Werb	U.S. General Services Administration
Chanelle Williams	U.S. Department of Interior - OSDDBU
Suzanne Winnard	U.S. General Services Administration
Jennifer Young	U.S. Department of Education
LaKeeta Young-Hill	NASA

Other Attendees

Linda Aase	USCG
Glenn Adler	Service Employees International Union
Loretta Alford	
Andrew Allen	Melwood
Pamela Allen	NFB of Louisiana
Linda Aase	USCG
Cheryl Bates-Harris	NDRN
Stephanie Benedetti	Lighthouse Louisiana
Julie Christensen	APSE
Anastasia Christman	National Employment Law Project
Christina Clift	Memphis Center for Independent Living
Stephen Connors	Goodworks Inc.
Daniel Davis	ACL
Leca Chapman Diehl	Transylvania Vocational Services
Ahmat Adam Djouma	CABVI

George Abbott	The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.
Suzanne Bakiewicz	Mozaic Chapter, NYSARC, Inc.
Borgi Beeler	MVW Services
Brian Behler	Sils'kin
Donovan Beitel	Alabama Industries for the Blind
Stephanie Benedetti	Lighthouse Louisiana
Richard Beutel	Cyrrus Analytics
Suzula Bidon	Chimes DC
Shannon Bloxham	PRIDE Industries
Chris Borsch	Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana
Lauren Branch	NewView
Amy Buresh	NFB of Nebraska
Daniel Burke	NFB of Colorado
Allan Burman	Consultant
Jennifer Campbell	VersAbility Resources, Inc.
Nan Cappel	NTI
Marci Carpenter	National Federation of the Blind
Rachel Carver	Outlook Business Solutions
Dustin Cather	NFB of Illinois
Nena Chadwick	NFB of Arkansas
Julie Christensen	APSE
Christina Clift	Memphis Center for Independent Living
Diane Coleman	Not Dead Yet
Jewelyn Cosgrove	Melwood HTC
Stephen Conners	Goodworks Inc.
William Craig	NFB
Norma Crosby	NFB Texas
Joe Cunningham	Goodwill of Colorado
Ben Dallin	Winston Salem Industries for the Blind
Darone Dancy	Eastern Carolina Vocational Center, Inc.
Carolyn Dankowski	Mount Rogers IDC
Dennis Dapolito	ServiceSource
Julie Dawson	NFBMO
Daniel Davis	ACL
Jasmine Davis	Allmond & Company
Morgan Davis	NACDD
Russ Davis	National Federation of the Blind
Zachary Davis	NFB
Leo Devora	CW Resources
Joe Diaz	Didlake
Leca Chapman Diehl	Transylvania Vocational Services
Tami Dillon	Skills'kin
Ahmat Adam Djouma	
Brigid Doherty	WMATA
Nancy DuBois	Hope Network – Service Corp
Amanda Elam	AVRE

John Ellzey	Association for Vision Rehab and Employment, Inc.
Todd Elzey	NFB of Ohio
Earl Everett	NFB
Michael Evers	NFB of Alabama
Ken Fernald	Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.
Mary Flores	PRIDE Industries, Inc.
Stephanie Flynt	National Federation of the Blind
Stacie Gallegos	NFB of Texas
Patricia Garcia	Landmark
Michael Geisler	The Lighthouse of Houston
Steve Gieber	KCDD
Ann Gillmore	Peckham, Inc.
Jennifer Googins	CW Resources, Inc.
Joshua Gould	Industries of the Blind
Gary Grassman	NFB
Jennifer Grazulewicz	Pride Industries
Karl Groninger	Melwood
Kasia Grzelkowski	VersAbility Resources
John Halverson	NFB of Arkansas
Charlotte Hammond	Challenge Unlimited
Uricka Harrison	NFB
Jeffrey Hawting	LC Industries
Shellena Heber	Valley Center for the Blind
Karina Hernandez	Mavagi
Susan Hicks	Wiregrass Rehab Center Inc.
Alyssa Hoadley	NACDD
Chris Hollingsworth	National Association of Blind Merchants
Laura Horrocks	PRIDE Industries
David Horton	IFB Solutions
Joshua Howe	Chimes D.C.
Alan Hubbard	NTI, Inc.
Reginald Hughes	Palmetto Goodwill Services
John Huff	ServiceSource
Robert Hutt	NBI
Douglas Ingram	NFB of Florida
Kelly Israel	Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Anne Jayes	Lighthouse Louisiana
Kayleigh Joiner	NFB of Texas
Kyle Johnson	Lighthouse Central Florida
David Jones	HHS
Lori Kain	GCE
Jon Katz	Bestwork Industries for the Blind
Robert Katz	ServiceSource
Larysa Kautz	Melwood
Adriann Keve	NFB of Florida
Terri Kio	North Central Sight Services

Mike Klimish	NFB of SD
Regina Kline	SmartJob
Nicole Knudsen	SEIU Local 49
Scott LaBarre	NFB
Chris LaFollette	Arizona Industries for the Blind
Scott Larson	NFB (Florida Affiliate)
John Lemus	AtWork!
Katie Lester	NFB
Paul Lewis	NFB-F
Blake Lohnes	Outlook Nebraska
Betsy Loveday	Lions Volunteer Blind Industries
Tracy Lucas	Palmetto Goodwill
Wayne Marsh	NFB of DE
Jennifer Mathis	Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Jim McCollum	NFB of Connecticut
Colleen McFadden	Association of Blind Merchants
Carolyn McGhee	NFB Missouri (Springfield chapter)
Carla McQuillan	NFB of Oregon
Kate McSweeney	ACCSES
Maryanne Melley	NFB of Connecticut
Mark Mellott	Global Connections to Employment
Isela Meraz	ReadyOne Industries
Harrison Misewicz	Chimes
Regina Mitchell	NFB of Nevada
Dennis Monday	Friendship Industries, Inc.
Philip Nuar	NFB
Sharon Maneki	NFB of Maryland
Wayne Marsh	
Jeffrey Martinelli	IBVI
Shaun Martinez	International Brotherhood of Teamsters
Michelle Mason	Technical College System of Georgia
Linda Melendez	NFB
Maryanne Melley	NFB of Connecticut
Mark Mellot	Global Connections to Employment
Jim McCollum	NFB of Connecticut
Karen McCulloh	National Organization of Nurses with Disabilities
Colleen McFadden	NFB and National Association of Blind Merchants
Carolyn McGhee	NFB – Missouri
Carla McQuillan	NFB of Oregon
Kate McSweeney	ACCSES
Isela Meraz	ReadyOne
Michelle Merritt	Allmond & Company LLC
Rostina Mincey	Palmetto Goodwill
Regina Mitchell	NFB of Nevada
Dennis Monday	Friendship Industries Inc.
Melissa Myers	North Central Sight Services

Akira Nakano	Fox Family Foundation 9
Swatha Nandhakumar	American Council of the Blind
Ari Ne'eman	SEIU
Yvette Nellans	TCH
Don Nelson	PRIDE Industries
Allison Nichol	EFA
Kate Nicholson	
Steve Noyes	Clover Imaging Group
Philip Nuar	NFB
Rebecca Ogle	Private citizen
Patrick O'Hara	The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.
Erin Olsen	NFB of Idaho
Tammy Owen	VIA
Lise Pace	Bosma Enterprises
Christina Palmer	NFB
Patrick Palmer	New View Oklahoma
Thomas Page	NFB of Kansas
John Pare	National Federation of the Blind
Brian Patchett	North Central Sight Services
Bruce Patterson	ServiceSource
Richard Payne	NFB
Patrina Pendarvis	NFB of Mississippi
Dan Phillips	CABVI
Kevin Pirnie	NFB
Michael Powell	NFB of Michigan
Erin Prangley	NACDD
Anna Price	NFB SC
Susan Prokop	Paralyzed Veterans of America
Clark Rachfal	American Council of the Blind
Angela Rader	NFB – F
Mark Riccobono	NFB
Charles Richman	SCORE
Darryl Rice	NFB
Ruben Rincon Jr.	NFB
Gregory Robinson	Autistic Self-Advocacy Network
Andrew Rood	NFB of Florida/Greater Jacksonville Chapter
Elizabeth Rouse	NFB of South Carolina
Terri Rupp	
Alejandra Sanchez	NFB
Cheryl Sanders	SEKRI
Erin Seigh	SPAN
Jennifer Simek	PRIDE Industries
Terry Smith	NFB of Tennessee
Sophia Sparks	NFB
Sharon Spratt	Cottonwood, Inc.
Harry Staley	NFB

Dennis Steiner	VisionCorps
David Steinmetz	Arizona Industries for the Blind
Virgil Stinnett	NFB of HI
Jinnerfer Strother	NFB of Nevada Affiliate
Ryan Strunk	NFB of Minnesota
Greg Szabo	The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.
Mark Tadder	NFB of Nevada
Joyce Taylor	NFB of Florida
Jason Telander	VTC Enterprises
Ed Thomas	Bestwork Industries for the Blind
Tracy Thompson	Goodwill Services Inc.
Scott Thornhill	Alphapointe
Lee Tillson	East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
George Tobler	Vision Corps
Jon Trapp	NTI
Duane Turnbull	Cottonwood Inc.
Gary Utz	Goodwill
Renee Vidrine	Lighthouse Louisiana
Adelmo Vigil	NFBNM
Laura Walling	Goodwill Industries International
Kyle Walls	NFB
Kent Walters	Goodwill Industries of Southeastern WI, Inc.
Cynthia Watson	San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind
Sharon Weddington	NFB of NC
Craig Wellons	ReadyOne Industries
M.J. Willard	NTI
Bob Williams	Communication FIRST
Daniel Williams	Lighthouse for the Blind of Houston
Sheila Williams	Palmetto Goodwill Services
Liz Wisecarver	NFB of Texas
Shawn Wolfgram	GW Commercial Services Inc. of Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana
Karen Wong	Lanakila Pacific
Sheila Wright	NFB
Gary Wunder	NFB
Justin Young	NFB of New York State
Yiran Zhang	SEIU Local 1
Kristina Zwick	Peckham, Inc.