

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSTITUTE'S

Washington Insider



National Disability Institute's Washington Insider is a monthly newsletter highlighting key federal policy news that impacts the financial futures and economic empowerment of all people with disabilities. The Washington Insider tracks legislative and policy initiatives gaining momentum on Capitol Hill, specifically in the areas of taxation, asset building and economic development.

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Blog](#)

March 2018 | Vol. 10, Issue 3

CONTENTS

[Congress Passes Omnibus Appropriations Bill](#)

[Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act Heads to President's Desk](#)

[Social Security Administration Releases Updated ABLE Guidance](#)

[December Employment Numbers](#)

Congress Passes Omnibus Appropriations Bill

Congress successfully passed an omnibus appropriations bill, which provides the underlining funding for major federally funded programs, including those that provide support to individuals with disabilities and their families. This roughly \$1.3 trillion appropriations package included several positive items for individuals with disabilities, including:

- A significant funding increase for Section 8 Housing;
- Increased funding for the Social Security Administration (SSA), hopefully geared at addressing the backlog of applicants;
- Increased funding for the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Act programs – many of which focus on increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities;

- Increased funding for State Assistive Technology (AT) Programs;
- Increased funding for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Programs;
- A slight increase in funding for State Vocational Rehabilitation Grants; and
- Level funding for the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).

National Disability Institute (NDI) appreciates Congress' recognition for the need to better support individuals with disabilities and their families and thanks Members on both sides of the aisle who supported these increases.

[Learn more about other aspects of the appropriations bill.](#)

[Back to top](#)

Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act Heads to President's Desk

This month, both chambers of Congress passed the "Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act," also known as H.R. 4547.

H.R. 4547 aims to strengthen the **Social Security Administration's (SSA) Representative (Rep) Payee program**. The Rep Payee program provides assistance to Social Security Disability beneficiaries – Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) – by providing them with a rep payee, if deemed necessary. The responsibility of the rep payee is to provide support to the Social Security beneficiary and help manage their SSI or SSDI cash benefit. There is an estimated 8 million Social Security beneficiaries who are currently provided supports by a rep payee.

H.R. 4547, soon to be signed into law, aims to strengthen the program by increasing oversight and monitoring of individual rep payees, of which there are approximately 5 million. The goal of the increased oversight is to decrease and deter instances of financial exploitation and abuse by rep payees upon individuals with disabilities who are receiving Social Security disability benefits.

National Disability Institute (NDI) wishes to thank the Members of Congress who supported this piece of legislation in becoming law. Provisions such as those in the Act will keep individuals with disabilities from becoming victims of financial exploitation.

[Back to top](#)

Social Security Administration Releases Updated ABLÉ Guidance

On March 8, 2018, the Social Security Administration (SSA) published an updated version of its Program Operations Manual System (POMS) regarding the ABLÉ Act and ABLÉ accounts. POMS is based upon the law and is an operational policy reference used by SSA internal staff to conduct SSA business. Highlights include:

- **Partnerships that States can use to administer ABLE accounts.** The partnerships identified include: (1) A consortium where the State has their own ABLE program, but joins other States so that it can provide lower administrative costs and better investment options than they could provide on their own; (2) States with their own ABLE program, but contract with private companies or with other States to manage their ABLE program; and (3) States which do not operate their own ABLE program, but partner with another State to offer the other State’s ABLE program to their residents.
- **Treatment of duplicate ABLE accounts.** If there is more than one ABLE account administered by a qualified ABLE program, it discusses treatment of the account as a resource except for cases of a rollover or program-to-program transfer.
- **Clarification of excluded contributions.** It clarifies the exclusion of contributions made into an ABLE account as income to the beneficiary, and it explains what income is countable when deposited into an ABLE account via direct deposit or otherwise. It discusses transfer of funds from a trust and when an ABLE contribution will be treated as a completed gift.
- **Simplification of Qualified Disability Expense (QDE) examples to make them more general at the request of the IRS.** The references to qualified disability expenses (QDEs) were changed to be consistent with the IRS’ ABLE law.*
- **Data Exchange.** It explains when the States began reporting data to SSA on a monthly basis and includes a list of the shared data.
- **Usage of debit cards.** It provides details of the information that SSA will receive via data exchange about distributions made via an ABLE prepaid debit card. Monies distributed onto an ABLE prepaid debit card are considered a qualified distribution unless determined otherwise.

*Final IRS regulations have not been published therefore the IRS position could change when the regulations are finalized. If this happens, SSA ABLE policy will be updated accordingly.

Additionally, [more information pertaining to the ABLE Act](#) can be found on the ABLE National Resource Center website.

[Read the document released by SSA.](#)

[Back to top](#)

February Employment Numbers

Disability employment statistics for February 2018 show that the unemployment rate among people with disabilities was 8.6 percent. This shows a 1.6 percent decrease from February 2017. The latest employment statistics also find that only 20.7 percent of people with disabilities are actively in the labor force, as compared to 68.4 percent of people with no disability. Data on people with disabilities covers those between the ages of 16 to 64 who do not live in institutions.

U.S. Disability Employment Profile				
Statistic	With Disability		Without Disability	
	Feb. 2017	Feb. 2018	Feb. 2017	Feb. 2018
Percent of Population in the Labor Force	20.4	20.7	68.4	68.4
Employment-Population Ratio	18.3	18.9	65.2	65.5
Unemployment Rate	10.2	8.6	4.7	4.2

As reported by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table A-6

[Back to top](#)



**NATIONAL DISABILITY INSTITUTE: *Celebrating 10 Years of
Real Economic Impact for People with Disabilities***

1667 K Street, NW

Suite 480

Washington, DC 20006

Tel: (202) 296-2040

Fax: (202) 296-2047

www.realeconomicimpact.org

info@ndi-inc.org