

CEO Commission for Disability Employment calls on fellow CEOs to take action during National Disability Employment Awareness Month 2021

To our fellow CEOs:

We are calling on you to take action during National Disability Awareness Month to help people with disabilities achieve equal employment rights. The time is right for you to use your power to affect change.

Throughout the past 20 months, the business community – in the United States and globally – has been under significant stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Federal Reserve, the pandemic led to the permanent closure of roughly 200,000 more businesses than would be expected in an average year.¹ This led to a 20% reduction in the number of employed, working-age people with disabilities from March to April of 2020.² While the pandemic is certainly not yet over, this National Disability Employment Awareness Month presents a very different landscape with new opportunities. New unemployment benefits claims are falling, and layoff rates are the lowest they have been in roughly 20 years.³ Additionally, the Department of Labor announced that as of June 2021 there were 10.1 million job openings.⁴

For people with disabilities, the unemployment rate is more than double that of people without a disability.⁵ More telling, the Labor Force Participation Rate for people with disabilities trails their peers with no disabilities by 46%.⁶ The CEO Commission for Disability Employment calls on business leaders to tap into this underutilized source of talent because the new workplace can only meet its full potential when people with disabilities are no longer underrepresented.

The CEO Commission for Disability Employment was founded in 2018 by Voya Financial, SHRM (the Society for Human Resource Management) and the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) to address these disparities in disability employment by providing research and information, actionable steps and advocacy opportunities for member companies to recruit and onboard individuals with disabilities. Over the past twelve months, the CEO Commission's membership has grown by 70%. We are grateful to these organizations for their commitment to disability employment.

¹ Crane, Leland D., Ryan A. Decker, Aaron Flaaen, Adrian Hamins-Puertolas, and Christopher Kurz. Rep. Business Exit During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Non-Traditional Measures in Historical Context. Federal Reserve Board, April 2021. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/feds/files/2020089r1pap.pdf>.

² Houtenville, Andrew, and John O'Neill. "NTIDE May 2020 Special Report: Workers with Disabilities in the COVID Economy." Kessler Foundation, May 20, 2020. <https://kesslerfoundation.org/press-release/ntide-may-2020-report-covid-economy>.

³ Mutikana, Lucia. "U.S. Unemployment Rolls Shrinking in Boost to Labor Market Recovery." Reuters, August 5, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/business/us-weekly-jobless-claims-fall-layoffs-lowest-more-than-21-years-2021-08-05/>.

⁴ "Job Openings and Labor Turnover - July 2021." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 8, 2021. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.nr0.htm>.

⁵ Office of Disability Employment Policy. U.S. Department of Labor, n.d. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep>.

⁶ Office of Disability Employment Policy. U.S. Department of Labor, n.d. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep>.



This National Disability Employment Awareness Month, we are calling on our fellow CEOs to take the following actions:

- recognize that we are at a pivotal moment in terms of talent acquisition,
- acknowledge the tremendous value that employees with disabilities bring to our companies, communities and society as a whole,
- understand the need to develop inclusive and welcoming cultures within our organizations, and
- commit to unlocking the untapped potential of people with disabilities.

Business leaders have demonstrated a commitment to addressing society's biggest challenges. As founders of the CEO Commission for Disability Employment, we urge you join us this National Disability Employment Awareness Month as we work to build more inclusive workplaces that work for all.

Sincerely,

Kandi Pickard – NDSS President and CEO

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. – SHRM President and CEO

Rodney O. Martin, Jr. – Voya Financial Chairman and CEO