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Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

The Workforce Investment Act: Creating Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

presenters:

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Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities

Ms. Mack: The title of our call today is “The Workforce Investment Act: Creating Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities.” We are very honored to have Richard Horne, Maggie Leedy, and Irene Lynn presenting. Richard Horne is with the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities; Irene Lynn is from the Office of Youth Opportunities of the U.S. Department of Labor, and Maggie Leedy is the One-Stop Services Coordinator at Montgomery Works.

So, with that, I am going to turn the call over to Richard, and I think this is going to be very informative.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mary, and good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for taking some time out in what’s been a very busy and difficult week, I know, for everyone across the country. Our thoughts and prayers go out to our friends and colleagues in New York and Washington who were so directly affected by that tragedy.

It’s a pleasure to be on this call. It’s certainly a great respite from a very busy time here in D.C. I am a senior policy advisor with the Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities. Our mission is to create a nationally coordinated strategy to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities and to have that strategy in place and reported to the President in July 2002.

We have been working at the Task Force for almost three years now around these issues of employment, and I think one of our biggest beliefs is that if we keep doing what we are doing, we are going to continue to get what we have received. We have to build the capacity of our generic systems to

equip them to better serve people with disabilities, and in the context of this conversation, certainly the great opportunities that the WIA presents.

I am so pleased that Irene and Maggie are on the line to give us a national perspective and a local perspective on what can actually be done in these systems to serve youth with disabilities. So, I am going to try to let them do most of the talking.

I will update you on a couple of things that we have been doing here at the Task Force to continue to roll out our youth-to-work initiative. We are almost done with our resource-mapping project. We looked at well over 160 federal programs in 18 different federal agencies, and looked at the extent to which these programs are equipped to serve youth with disabilities and how we can better coordinate these programs and provide the resources at the local level that people across the country are telling us they need.

The second project I think of interest to you all are the three completed focus groups. We held these focus groups with youth with disabilities from across the country and really have learned a tremendous amount from their voices about what works and what doesn’t and what their expectations are and, again, what we need to do to make systems that are responsive to their needs, desires, and choices. We are going to be releasing that report, we hope, in the next month.

We just closed the nominations process for the Youth Advisory Council to the Task Force and the Department of Labor. We were very pleased to receive well over 100 nominations of youth from across the country, many of them self-nominated

to serve on this Council. The Council will be made up of about 15 youth, so we certainly do have our work ahead of us in terms of going through all of the wonderful letters and supplemental materials that we received from youth across the country.

Finally, I just want to put in a plug to you all for October 24, which is Disability Mentoring Day. If you haven't participated or would like to get more information about Disability Mentoring Day, you can certainly log onto the Web site of our partner, the American Association of People with Disabilities, at www.aapd-dc.org.

With that, I am going to turn it over to Irene and Maggie. Irene has been a close colleague of mine and a great supporter of these issues representing the Department of Labor both in her experiences with the School to Work Office and in her current responsibilities as director of the Office of Youth Opportunities within the Employment and Training Administration here at the Department of Labor.

Also with us is Maggie Leedy, and Maggie is the One-Stop Services Coordinator for Montgomery Works, which is Montgomery County, Maryland's Employment Resource Center. She coordinates disability-related services and accommodations for the One-Stop. I think many people know Maggie nationally as a motivational speaker and for her expertise in training and technical assistance on workplace accommodations, disability awareness, and other issues surrounding the workplace.

So, again, we are very pleased to have both Irene and Maggie with us. They are both going to do some brief presentations of about 15 minutes each and then we will open this up for questions and answers. So, Irene?

Ms. Lynn: Thank you, Richard. That was a nice introduction. Good afternoon folks. I would like to just spend about 10 or 15 minutes giving you an update of youth activities under the WIA, and I am not exactly sure who is on the line or where you sit so I hope I am not too elementary for some of you.

We are in our second year of operation in terms of youth programs under the WIA. That includes both for this year \$127 billion dollars in what we call formula funds that have gone out to some 600 local workforce areas around the country, and the youth opportunity grants which represent

in total a smaller dollar investment but a very much more concentrated investment.

We have 36 sites that are also in their second year of operation and are supported by about \$250 million dollars in WIA funds. So, whereas the funding of the WIA takes a large amount of money and spreads it over a great many areas, the 36 youth opportunity grants represent probably our largest single investment in youth activity outside the Job Corps.

For those of you who are familiar with our work, you know that moving into WIA has been challenging on both fronts, on both the formula side and on the youth opportunity grants. The good news is that the system out there, our workforce investment system, really took to heart the changes under WIA and the call for more comprehensive high-quality services. So, what that meant is that it has taken, at least on the formula side, a bit of time for the system to shift gears and really begin providing a high level of service across the country.

But, that picture is starting to change and what we are seeing now—and I think this is really interesting and encouraging—is that the number of program registrants is increasing every quarter. The data we have for June 30, which is somewhat incomplete, shows that we are up to about 250,000 program registrants under the formula-funded programs. While it represents a big increase, to put it into perspective, that's something like maybe a third of the number of people that were served under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).

But what appears to be happening is that these youth that are being served are being served more comprehensively because expenditures have also risen dramatically. In the first few quarters of operation under WIA, expenditures were really kind of flat and low, but they are now up to about 80% of the funding that was available for that year. So, I think those are all good, positive signs that the system is really beginning to take hold across the country.

One of the reasons we have heard at least from those folks who have been out looking at the states and locals, and maybe Maggie can confirm this, is that one of the things that has taken time is the youth councils. Available information suggests that in many areas of the country the youth councils have been slow in forming. Many actually did not even get appointed until after WIA took

effect, which was last July 1. The youth councils are probably the most prominent new feature in WIA because they are a policy-making body that can impact how WIA funds are expended within a local area and also offer, I think, an opportunity for the coordination and leveraging of funds across all youth-serving agencies within the local area.

The workforce development system is no stranger to the disability community and how well they have served youth with disabilities has certainly varied from place to place across the country. But with these new youth councils there is considerable opportunity to make sure that youth with disabilities are adequately represented in the population that is served. Certainly the WIA makes special acknowledgement of youth with disabilities in that the regulations say that for a young person with disabilities that their own income status is all that counts in determining their eligibility under WIA as opposed to other youth where family income is taken into account. So, in any case there is a lot of opportunity here for local areas, for advocacy groups and service providers who work with youth with disabilities, to participate in the youth councils, and I hope that, as we go on with this call maybe some of you can talk about how you are doing so. We have been trying to work with our state and local partners to provide some assistance to youth councils and to the state and local areas in identifying issues and concerns that are getting in the way of fully implementing the WIA provisions.

Richard participated with us in several meetings we have had with representatives from states and locals, and we are in the process of trying to put out some new tools for youth council members so that they can more clearly understand what their role is. We are also working on putting out some clarifications around competitive procurement requirements and how you identify and document eligibility and around questions that have arisen about out-of-school youth.

The outlook for the formula-funded program is really positive as it is under the Youth Opportunity Grant. I don't know how many of you are familiar with those efforts, but as I mentioned, we have 36 sites across the country. A high number of them, about 24, are in urban areas. They are all high poverty communities. Six are in rural sites, and

six are in Native American sites.

We announced those grants more than a year ago in February, but they really didn't get started going until about a year ago last May. We have put a considerable amount of energy and assistance to making and getting these sites up and running. It's easier when you have a universe of 36 to work with instead of over 600 to put a lot of emphasis around that. These are very large-scale operations in that they all involve hiring a number of staff. They all involve having at least one, and in many areas, multiple centers where youth can come, and they all involve providing an intensive array of services that include not just employment-related services but also recreation, community service, and other kinds of services that develop youth as citizens.

I think that our work there is also beginning to show some results. What we are seeing now is that there are approximately 30,000 youth that are enrolled in these programs, and that's close to what we would say is full operation level. We expect that these programs each year will serve about 44,000 youth. In terms of rolling these programs out and working with these sites, what we have tried to do is to continually keep in front of them the importance of including all youth in terms of the youth they serve.

We have placed a high priority on making sure that every center that is open is fully accessible to all youth in the community. We have sent out specific items to our sites on serving youth with disabilities, and we have had Mary Mack and Richard helping us do those things. We have had two grantee meetings that brought everyone together, and we have included Richard or other folks with disability backgrounds to speak and to conduct workshops.

We also support what we call a National Youth Opportunity Grant Leadership Institute that provides front-line training to the caseworkers, job developers, and other staff who operate these youth opportunity grant sites. We have made sure that we have included disability on the agenda there in terms of speaking to folks. For our next session that's coming up in December, what we plan to do is actually to have one whole course on serving youth with special needs.

So, what I feel good about is that we have really taken on an advocacy role in making sure that young folks with disabilities aren't left behind in terms of

these investments in the workforce, whether it be the formula funds or the youth opportunity grants. What we are seeing in terms of the youth opportunity grants is not only are they making sure that their centers are fully accessible to youth but that many of them have set up specific partnerships with agencies that serve youth with disabilities in the community to make sure that they are able to do outreach to recruit these kids and to serve them adequately.

For all that, we cannot rest on our laurels and say we have done a really good job in the WIA and we have done a really good job in the Youth Opportunity Grants program. But it seems to me, and I suspect that from your work you would agree with it, that the emphasis on youth with disabilities needs to be an ongoing responsibility. Certainly we can continue to work with our sites, which we will in our youth opportunity grant sites. We can continue to encourage that for formula-funded programs, make sure that they do what they are supposed to do, which is to serve those kids who are most in need, that we have a ready population with so many of the youth with disabilities.

But ultimately for these programs to be successful in reaching out to special populations of youth will require folks at the local level who serve these kids and know where they are and know how to serve them, that they get involved with our youth opportunity grant centers and with our youth councils, and through those kinds of ongoing efforts and with the national support in place, then I think that we can look to the workforce investment system to play a key role in terms of youth development activities for youth.

So, with that, I think I will turn it back over to you, Richard, and after Maggie talks, we can entertain a few questions.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Irene, very much. I also want to let you all know that the U.S. Department of Labor is also launching some coordination within the agency again aimed at building that capacity of the system to serve youth with disabilities. I certainly hope that you all are familiar that through the FY 2001 appropriations process the Office of Disability Employment Policy was created here in the Department of Labor, which will be led by a Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy. That office is getting up, and it's run-

ning. It released several grant announcements that were turned in in late August and early September in terms of working with ETA and the youth office.

There will be a large technical assistance effort aimed at doing the training and building that kind of capacity and lending that kind of assistance that Irene was talking about, and we are also going to fund some model demonstration projects and try to infuse some best practices into local WIA-assisted youth programs nationally and hopefully be able to sustain those efforts over the next five years.

So, I think that, as Irene said, we are not quite where we want to be yet. I think we are getting there. I think we are making progress. I think that it really has become a great priority within the Department of Labor and certainly within Irene's office, and we certainly look forward to that ongoing collaboration and coordination.

So, how does this translate into what works or what doesn't work at the local level? Well, again, we have with us Maggie Leedy from Montgomery Works, and I hope that she is going to enlighten us a little bit about what's happening there at the local level. Maggie?

Ms. Leedy: I am very happy to be here today. To give you a little introduction into what I actually do, I have worked in the disability field for close to 20 years training employers on ADA, on reasonable accommodation, disability awareness, working with job seekers in the school system, in the community college system with Department of Rehabilitation Services, helping them find jobs. One of my major frustrations was always how separate our services were and the need for everyone to work together.

When I found out about this WIA and really what it proposed to do, I was thrilled and went right away to the people who were getting our One-Stop up and running and asked them questions such as, "How are you going to serve people with disabilities? How are you going to coordinate with special education in the school system? How are you going to accommodate people coming in who have physical disabilities or sensory disabilities? What are you going to do when somebody who is blind comes in and wants to use your resource room?" As their jaws literally dropped, they offered me a job. That is how I became the One-Stop Services Coordinator at Montgomery Works.

So, my job is to coordinate all disability efforts there, accommodation needs, and partner efforts. We have 14 co-located partners, 22 partners in all. So, I do the scheduling, I hold monthly meetings, cross-training, provide disability awareness, and kind of get everybody working together.

Today I am going to talk about what we do on the youth side. We have an actual group called Montgomery Youth Works that provides services to youth ages 14-22. I am going to describe some of the things that we do at Montgomery Works. Historically, under Carl Perkins and JTPA, statutory inclusion of people with disabilities was mandated, but we know that before WIA the inclusion of people with disabilities was not measured and didn't always happen.

So, now that we do have WIA reflecting the federal intent to ensure that all people with disabilities participate and that there are no longer eligibility requirements for core services and youth services, it really has become a universally accessible system, at least here in Montgomery County. I can only speak really for what we do, and I am very proud of what we do.

The reconstituted workforce investment system offers several potential advantages for youth with disabilities, no matter what their stage of career development. Some of these advantages include just the availability of career development information, a place where you can go and look at the areas of the economy, who are the employers, who are the largest employers, what careers are developing, what are diminishing, what is available as far as resume development and those kinds of resources.

I went to a training last week on the DOL's American's Career Kit and what is available there, which I did a training to be training the school system and all of our people in the One-Stop on the resources available with that kit. I would like to share the Web site for anybody listening to this tremendous resource. It is <http://www.acinet.org/acinet/>.

Some of the other services are expanded opportunities for work-based learning and jobs. Montgomery Youth Works actually works as a staffing service here. They recruit companies interested in hiring youth as a workforce of tomorrow, and they set up jobs for the summer. They set up jobs during the year. They have the youth come in—any youth—

and interview. They go through a job readiness class, and as an employer requests somebody for a job, they send three eligible candidates and do a job service.

Some of the generic career development employment training services offered by the One-Stop provide services that have not always been available to customers with disabilities, whether it was due to lack of accommodations, lack of expertise by personnel in the disability field, or over-reliance on disability-specific services. I remember one of the great fears in the disability community was, oh my gosh, we are going to walk into these One-Stops, they are going to have wonderful services, and they are going to say go to the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), go to VR. We have worked very hard to include VR but not as the only service available.

Part of my job under the disability portion has involved cross-training, I do disability awareness training, ADA training for partners and staff. I do a little newsletter called Disability Updates, which features just what is going on at Montgomery Works for disability. The fall edition included what accommodations we have available to visitors who are blind or have low vision, disability awareness training, a survey for staff, and services that we provide for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

One of the other services under WIA is just the indefinite lifelong access to a One-Stop. The core services of One-Stop are available nationally. They are available to anybody at any time, so if youth today learn about One-Stop, that can only enhance their success now and later in life because we can only get better. There's a place where there are jobs listed. You can use a computer. You can print a resume. You can fax a resume. You can get e-mail. Just incredible, and people are still shocked every day when they walk into a One-Stop.

The reduction of stigma, I think the emphasis on universal access makes it—you know, people are coming in, all kinds of people, and it doesn't really matter about disability. We are not asking anything, you know, how much money do you make? How much money does your family make? Do you have a disability? Do you not? How old are you? It doesn't matter because our services are for anybody. The reduction of stigma, I think, and also we are increasing the self-determination of people with disabilities.

I was excited last month, the Arc of Mont-

gomery County called me and said we have a job club and we really want to bring out our clients to meet with you and have you talk about the One-Stop and we are going to have the job coaches come with them. So, I said okay, that would be fine, and we got together. There were maybe five individuals there who were clients of the Arc and then their career personnel, their job coaches. The first thing I asked is, "How many of you are familiar with Montgomery Works or One-Stop?"

Well, all five of the clients raised their hands. They had all been there. They had all registered with the job service, and some had even taken a class. None of the Arc personnel had, so I found that interesting and was also very encouraged by that. The coordinated involvement of VR has been very successful with us. Most of the clients coming in are actually already clients of VR and just have been referred by them and have heard that jobs are available and are benefiting from that.

We do have five co-located partners that are disability service providers, including DORS. We also have one that serves people with mental health needs and hearing. We have services twice a week for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, so we have coordinated very well with DORS. We have also tried very hard to coordinate with the school systems, special educators, and transition practitioners because they need to know what's available through Montgomery Youth Works. We do have transition support teachers coming through, job coaches. This summer we had a group come from D.C. that were college-bound youth with disabilities coming to see what we have and learn more about the program.

I will describe quickly a few more programs that we operate. We have a career institute which is a job readiness training career exploration curriculum delivered during the summer to 14- and 15-year-old youth and special education students all signed under WIA guidelines as economically disadvantaged or with a disability. That is a program directed to goal setting, academic enrichment, life skills, and career exploration. They have guest speakers and take people out to the world of work and see what is happening.

Another program we have is job readiness training at our detention center, our youth detention center, designed for youth offenders, many

of whom do have hidden and not-so-hidden disabilities, and that focuses on job attainment and retention. So, I guess I can end with that. I am very excited about what we do, and I am very happy to answer any questions anyone may have.

Mr. Horne: Maggie, thank you very, very much. This was a tremendous amount of information, and it sounds like you are doing some very exciting things there in Montgomery County. At this point, I would like to just turn it back over to the participants on the call to take some questions and maybe to have a little exchange here. So, does anyone have a question or comment?

Ms. Posey: I have a question. This is Ginny Posey from Foundation for Educational Achievement in San Diego. Irene, you mentioned the youth councils as part of the new programs in place and that they were a policy-making body. Do you have those, Maggie, in your program, and can you tell us a little bit more about how they actually work?

Ms. Leedy: I knew somebody was going to ask me that. I am truly a local hands-on person. The funding and the policy part of our One-Stop comes through our Workforce Development Corporation, and I did contact them to find out whether or not we had a youth council, and we do, and it's part of the chamber and Workforce Development Corporation. Apparently they meet monthly after the regular meeting, but I didn't really get much further than that, which led me to believe—and I probably shouldn't say this publicly—that we would be one of the slow-in-forming youth groups.

Mr. Horne: Is there anyone out there who can share their experience with youth councils? All right then, looks like we have some work to do on that one.

Ms. Lynn: Well, you know, in fact every indication that we had is that youth councils have been rather slow to form. As a minimum, what they are supposed to do under WIA is to recommend eligible service providers for WIA, but this is in concert with a competitive environment that providers be selected competitively but what the youth council can or should do is inform what that competitive process looks like, who are the priority groups for service including perhaps youth with disabilities, what's the mix of services that should be offered in the local area that are paid for by WIA funds, taking

into account what other services are already available in the community and then making recommendations to the local workforce board in terms of actual selection of providers and then having some ongoing responsibilities for providing some program oversight for programs that are currently operating to make sure that they are meeting their objectives.

Then finally the local workforce area had to submit a workforce plan to the state. It's a five-year plan, and that's the plan upon which the board in the area was certified and that the state issues funding. Part of that plan is a plan for youth services within the area, and theoretically the youth council was supposed to develop that part of the local plan, but you know, as a practical matter, plans ended up having to be submitted and rolled up into a state-wide plan to submit to the Department of Labor in many cases before the youth councils were ever appointed. So, what many areas, we think, might eventually come to is that the local youth council as it gets operational will look at that local plan and make changes to it on policy input and guidance.

Unidentified Participant: We have a question for Maggie Leedy regarding the summer youth programs. We have a number of students that we get involved in the programs that have disabilities, but typically we are not able to have students with more severe disabilities involved because the funding is not always available for them to receive job search support. Does she have job search support and does she see any way for additional funding to be available for that support in other communities?

Ms. Leedy: I think that partnering is the key with this. There are so many agencies that are going to pick up transition-age youth coming out of the schools, people with more severe needs. I bet they would love to partner with you now so when the students do transition, they will already have a job and the supports will be in place. I know that adult service agencies look for that. So, you might want to see who is picking up these students when they are exiting high school and see what kind of relationships you could form there.

Another thing that I recommend is actual employer training on how to support people in the workforce, all kinds of support, and a lot more employer training on what it takes to allow somebody to succeed. Of course, when you talk to employers,

you don't want to use the term job coach. Just use the term reasonable accommodation and tell them that's what you are going to teach them how to do.

Ms. Posey: This is Ginny Posey again. While we get more questions, I just have one more. I have been wondering since WIA '98 has been in effect, if the handover from the high school with the One-Stop to VR, have we seen a tremendous difference in terms of services to all disabilities, not just, you know, the hardest or the most severe but all people with disabilities? Have we seen anything?

Ms. Leedy: What I have seen here in the One-Stop is people that go to DORS are looking for job assistance and career assistance, and they really don't have the capacity to serve all the people coming to them. That's why this partnership is working out great, to have them here, the people with disabilities that come through our door is such a huge range, and I tell you it is wonderful to see and the reaction is, oh my gosh, where has this place been? We have set up jobs on our computers; in our computer workshops we have that. We have our materials in Braille. We have interpreter services. We have career counselors that we have trained how to work with people who may have developmental disabilities or physical disabilities, and I think just getting people involved in the generic system is really taking hold, at least that's what I see.

Ms. Posey: That's good to hear because that means that the One-Stops really do aid in the partnership with all these agencies.

Ms. Leedy: Absolutely.

Ms. Sword: Richard, the resource mapping project that you talked about at the beginning of the call, when will copies of that be available?

Mr. Horne: I am working with the contractor right now on the final report. I am hoping to have the report ready for dissemination later in the fall. My biggest challenge with it is actually getting all of the agency profiles. There are so many of them that I just don't see the utility of trying to print them. It right now takes up pretty much three large binders, and so we are working with the contractor to develop a searchable database with this information on it so that folks can actually go to our Web site and actually search by program or content area and see the different programs that are available.

Ms. Leedy: I would like to add one more

thing that we are working on. Richard, I am sure you know about this, but the Department of Labor is really looking at all of their programs and seeing how they can include more people with disabilities. I got to go to a summit meeting on how to include more people with disabilities in the Job Corps, which is a great program for youth, and they are looking at accommodation needs and how they can really get people in there and also apprenticeship and training and looking at how they can include more people with disabilities.

Mr. Horne: I think our responsibility is to do some cross-field sharing. You know, how do we work these programs into transition planning for youth in high school. What are we doing in our schools in terms of outreach to out-of-school kids? You know, we lose a lot of our kids. We all know that. How can we better connect that system up locally, and that's why these partnerships at the local level are so critical. But again, you know, we have all got to learn some different language and some different terms. We have got to stick our neck out and really do the interagency stuff that needs to be done so that we are connecting these youth who need these services with the services that are available and where we need to make improvements in service delivery, taking that on and moving it forward.

Ms. Mack: I think, as you talk about this, that perhaps the callers would be interested to know that our center is engaged in looking at various ways in which people are coming together in resource mapping, both looking at the federal effort and at some state examples of how we will be working on that.

We have got a capacity building institute in Washington at the end of October, and we will be working on that and providing information both through our Web site, capacity building institute publications, and other vehicles, around how people are making these connections, how communities are coming together to make sure that these resources are working well for all youth including youth with disabilities.

Ms. Lynn: You know, in that connection we have recently completed a small project that we did with the Leonard Resource Group here in Washington, and it is a funding guide that is organized around topical areas, and it is for youth services. It includes funding that is mostly federal funding but

also some foundation funding, and it's useful for communities whether it be under the direction of the youth council or somewhere else that wants to do any kind of community resource mapping. If you are interested in accessing that guide, it's on our Web site, *doleta.gov*, and on the Youth Services menu.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Irene. In closing the call, we just wanted to leave a brief time for exchange of any Web sites or E-mails.

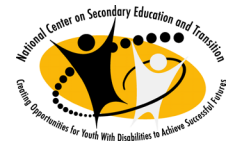
Ms. Leedy: I could give our local Web site. It's *www.montgomeryworks.com*, and if anyone would like to E-mail me, it's *mleedy@montgomeryworks.com*. Our Web site is both in English and Spanish, and we just won an award for the ease of its use. So, we welcome you to check us out. Our youth works has its own site, which you may be interested in. It's *www.montgomeryyouthworks.com*.

Mr. Horne: Thanks to our presenters and thanks to our participants for being on the call. Again, if you need to contact us, you've got all of our Web sites, and we are from the federal government—at least two of us—and we are here to help you.

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