



**Comments Prepared for the Senate Education Committee Interim Hearing
Study the Effectiveness of Public School Programs Serving Special Education Students
June 23, 2008**

The Center for Disability Studies at The University of Texas appreciates your consideration of our comments on this extremely important issue. While I am here representing the Center, I am also currently serving as chair of the Children's Policy Council (CPC) and a member of the HB 1230 workgroup addressing issues around employment opportunities for youth with disabilities transitioning from secondary education.

The CPC is a legislatively mandated state advisory committee charged with making recommendations to the legislature to improve the system of services for children with disabilities. The CPC issued its required biennial legislative report prior to the 80th Legislative Session. Three of the 18 recommendations included in the report addressed employment and supported employment issues for youth with disabilities. This is strong evidence that Council members believe that the current system of supports intended to ensure that these youth have access to meaningful employment opportunities, simply has not been working.

Too many young adults with disabilities are sitting at home with little or nothing to do. These are individuals who throughout their childhood were included in classrooms and communities. Now many are spending their time isolated and depressed.

The 80th Legislature recognized the need to attack the problems by passing HB 1230 (Rodriguez). HB 1230 had several components, but the one I'm here to talk to you about is the workgroup that was charged with developing a plan to:

- ensure that youth with a disabilities transitioning to post-schooling activities, services for adults, or community living have choices about their work and career and have the opportunity and support necessary to seek individualized, competitive employment in the community;
- improve the collaboration between health and human services agencies, other state agencies, and community and local service providers to maximize existing supported employment resources; and increase the quality and quantity of available supported employment opportunities.

The CPC and the HB 1230 workgroup identified a number of barriers to meaningful employment including:

- ineffective transition planning in schools due to lack of, and inconsistencies in, expertise/skill, resources, quality standards, and accountability
- lack of access to needed employment/supported employment services while in school
- difficulty in accessing accurate and comprehensive information
- lack of coordination between agencies
- lack of quality controls and accountability with respect to employment services
- programmatic barriers
- insufficient number of quality employment service providers

The HB 1230 Report will be submitted to Executive Commissioner Hawkins and legislative leadership within a few weeks. The report contains a number of recommendations that, if implemented, would improve access to quality information and improve access to much needed employment services. Some of these recommendations apply to TEA, some to HHS agencies, some to TWC, and some of the recommendations apply across agencies requiring cooperation and coordination.

I am here today primarily to make you aware of the efforts of the HB 1230 Workgroup and the recommendations that will be available in the coming weeks. We are hopeful that you will recognize the value of improving employment opportunities for youth with disabilities and give serious consideration to these recommendations. Members of the CPC or of the HB 1230 Workgroup would be happy to meet with you and/or your staff or return to a future hearing to present and explain the recommendations.