



Center for Public  
Representation

## **NC Agrees to End Segregated Employment Services**

*Landmark Agreement Will Increase Employment Opportunities in Communities*

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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[In a landmark agreement](#), the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has agreed to phase out segregated employment services that rely heavily on the practice of paying workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities pennies on the dollar. The agreement promises to help over 1,000 disabled NC workers who currently work in segregated environments called sheltered workshops, where they are separated from their nondisabled peers, and often work for less than the minimum wage – far less, in many cases.

“That you could work five days a week and only earn ten dollars in this day and age is just unbelievable to most people,” said Chris Hodgson, attorney with Disability Rights NC (DRNC), one of two disability rights organizations who worked to hammer out the agreement with the NC DHHS. “This agreement recognizes that people with disabilities have interests and skills, and must have opportunities to pursue jobs of their own choosing. It also provides workers with disabilities a path out of poverty and a chance at economic stability.”

One of the individuals soon to benefit from this agreement is 26-year-old Kevin Bizzell of Shelby, NC. Mr. Bizzell does “piece work” five days a week at Cleveland Vocational Industries, where he is isolated from his community and paid sub-minimum wage.

Mr. Bizzell already has some experience working in the community and being compensated at the legal minimum wage. Since April, Mr. Bizzell has worked five hours every Saturday at Special Blendz Café, where he works with people with and without disabilities and earns minimum wage. With support services, Mr. Bizzell is learning to clean, make sandwiches, cut up fruits and vegetables, make coffee, and dish ice cream. “I like going out to the community to work,” Mr. Bizzell said, noting he likes receiving support to make sure he does a good job, and he also likes making more money. With the tips he receives from his customers, he is saving money for a trip to Disney World this summer.

Mr. Bizzell’s mother, Vickie Bizzell, said she is thrilled about the new agreement because it will help her son find more work in the community, where he wants to work and belongs. “It makes him

happy to know he gets to get up on a Saturday morning to go to a job, just like I have to get up to go to my job. It makes him feel more involved in the community and the sense of him having his own paycheck like other people in the community is so important.”

DRNC partnered with the Center for Public Representation (CPR) to achieve the agreement with DHHS. It will give people with disabilities the opportunity and support to leave the segregated workshops and find jobs in their communities. Under the agreement, no one will lose their current services. People will receive additional supports and services over the next five years to obtain jobs in the community that pay at least minimum wage.

“This new agreement will build a better future for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities without leaving anyone behind who is currently in a sheltered workshop,” said Steven J. Schwartz, Litigation Director for CPR. “We applaud North Carolina for taking this important step and committing its state agencies to eliminating funding to sheltered workshops. Segregating people with disabilities and paying them less than the minimum wage violates federal discrimination laws and is just plain wrong. Employment services that lead to competitive integrated employment of people with disabilities has long been the proven way to ensure people with disabilities can work in real jobs for real pay. We encourage additional states to follow North Carolina’s lead.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, sheltered workshops were popular. Without education and employment discrimination protections in place for persons with disabilities, governments turned to funding segregated workshops as an alternative to long-term unemployment. But as years passed, the disability community demanded to be treated fairly and equally. Federal and state laws began to guarantee people with disabilities could receive integrated education and work opportunities, and segregated work no longer had a meaningful purpose.

Using its federal authority to monitor settings where people with disabilities receive services, Hodgson and other DRNC staff have monitored sheltered workshops throughout the state over the past decade, interviewing workers, providers and advocates, and ensuring workers’ rights were protected in these settings. “We learned that segregated workshops typically are not successful in preparing workers for jobs in their communities and helping them transition out of the workshops,” Hodgson said. “This agreement recognizes that the days of placing people with disabilities in workshops and preparing them for a lifetime of earning less than the minimum wage must come to an end in North Carolina.”

The agreement fulfills Gov. Roy Cooper’s 2019 Executive Order 92, which states: “North Carolinians with disabilities should be able to secure employment in integrated community settings that provide competitive wages and benefits, enable them to reach their full potential, increase their economic self-sufficiency, and grant them dignity as members of the workforce.” This commitment to modernize and expand employment support services will allow North Carolinians with disabilities greater opportunity to secure competitive wages and benefits, increase their economic self-sufficiency, and increase their presence in the mainstream workforce. It will also enhance our communities by providing people with and without disabilities opportunities to work together.

“A fully integrated life in the community for all, regardless of disability status, is a key commitment,” said DHHS Secretary Kody H. Kinsley. “Equitable access to employment opportunities with a livable wage should be available to all. Although these segregated facilities have provided important services and supports, we can do more for North Carolinians with disabilities. We are committed to working with individuals and families to maximize employment services for all.

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Disability Rights North Carolina is the federally mandated protection and advocacy system in North Carolina, dedicated to advancing the rights of all people with disabilities, of all ages, statewide. DRNC is an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and a member of the National Disability Rights Network. Learn more about Disability Rights North Carolina at [disabilityrightsncc.org](http://disabilityrightsncc.org).

Center for Public Representation is dedicated to enforcing and expanding the rights of people with disabilities and others who are in segregated settings. CPR uses legal strategies, advocacy, and policy to design and implement systemic reform initiatives to promote the integration and full community participation of people with disabilities. Working on state, national and international levels, CPR is committed to equality, diversity and social justice in all its activities. To learn more, visit [www.centerforpublicrep.org](http://www.centerforpublicrep.org).

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