

# Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (AbilityOne Program)

## What is the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (AbilityOne)?

Enacted in 1938, the Wagner-O'Day Act sought to create employment opportunities for people who are blind by using the vast purchasing power of the federal government. In 1971, under the stewardship of the late Sen. Jacob Javits, the employment program was expanded to include people with significant disabilities. That expanded program — called AbilityOne — operates today under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act.

The AbilityOne program is the largest provider of employment opportunities for those who are either blind or have significant disabilities, employing approximately 46,000 people through more than 600 nonprofit agencies, including Goodwill®.

## Issues of Concern

Despite advances made since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employment of people with significant disabilities has declined over the past decade. In December, 2010 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that the portion of people with disabilities in the labor force was only 21 percent compared to 69.6 percent for persons with no disability. Furthermore, the unemployment rate for those with disabilities was 14.3 percent, compared with 8.9 percent for persons with no disability, not seasonally adjusted. One in five adults living in the U.S. have a disability, and over 22 million families nationwide have a member with a disability. There are clearly not enough employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities and no incentives for employers to hire these workers. While the federal government has enormous purchasing power, studies estimate that less than one-half percent of all procurement dollars go toward contracts that create jobs for workers with significant disabilities.

## AbilityOne and Goodwill Industries®

Goodwill Industries provides a broad range of commercial business services to government agencies, such as custodial work, food service, landscaping, manufacturing, and document management and destruction.

Over 75 community-based Goodwill agencies collectively engage more than 7,000 individuals to fulfill more than 350 AbilityOne contracts, while offering those workers job coaching and additional skills training. The Goodwill approach creates an important safety net when people with significant disabilities first enter the workforce or when job placements at other companies are unsuccessful.

## The Solution

Goodwill Industries shares the concerns of policymakers about the abysmal employment rate of people with disabilities, and believes that the AbilityOne program can help alleviate the problem of chronic unemployment for people with significant disabilities. Any congressional action should expand employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities and provide incentives for employers to hire these workers. Goodwill recommends that Congress amend the JWOD Act to:

- **Increase employment and choice of employment settings within the AbilityOne program.** Workers should have the ability to choose continued employment in the AbilityOne program or to choose another employment program.
- **Promote, encourage, and develop procurement opportunities through which more jobs are created.** The JWOD Act requires that certain goods and services be set aside for purchase exclusively from AbilityOne program agencies. Unfortunately, contracts are not honored by all federal agencies. Congress should consider ways to strengthen the ability of the Committee for Purchase, which oversees the program, to address non-compliance by federal agencies.
- **Ensure compliance and integrity within the program.** Legislation should clarify that the primary customer is the individual with a disability, and the Committee for Purchase should ensure compliance with such policies.

## Action Requested

Goodwill Industries urges Congress to support legislation to improve and modernize the AbilityOne Program to expand opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities and to increase procurement opportunities for nonprofits like Goodwill.

## About Goodwill

Goodwill generates opportunities for people to achieve economic stability and build strong families and vibrant communities by offering job training, employment placement services and other community-based programs for people who have disabilities, lack education or job experience, or face employment challenges. In 2009, approximately 155,000 people in the United States and Canada obtained meaningful employment as a result of Goodwill career services programs. Collectively, these employees earned \$2.5 billion in salaries and wages and contributed to their communities as productive, tax-paying citizens.

## For more information, contact the Goodwill Industries International public policy team:

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***“This time two years ago I was living in a shelter wondering if I would ever find a job. Since I got connected to Goodwill and the AbilityOne program my life has turned around. I am working again. I am a functional part of society. I have been able to move into my own apartment and I am now self-supporting.” Shirley Schultz – Read more at [www.goodwill.org](http://www.goodwill.org)***