

# The Workforce Investment Act and Vocational Rehabilitation Act

## What are the Workforce Investment Act and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act?

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (Public Law 105-220) integrates several federal employment and training programs, and is the primary workforce development vehicle of the U.S. Department of Labor. The WIA was designed to create a universal system of one-stop career centers to provide access to training and employment services for a range of workers, including low-income adults and youth, dislocated workers, and people with disabilities. The system uses a central one-stop career center designed to provide core employment services to job seekers and to meet the needs of employers.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act (Title IV of the WIA) is the primary federal/state program assisting individuals with disabilities — including individuals with the most severe disabilities — to secure employment.

## The Opportunity

In the midst of the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression, Congress has resumed its work, after a nearly six-year delay, to develop legislation that would reauthorize both the WIA and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. In the wake of steadily eroding federal funding for the WIA since 2002, congressional efforts to reauthorize the act offer a new opportunity to ensure that the public workforce system is responsive to the diverse needs of workers and employers — including harder-to-serve populations.

## The WIA and Goodwill Industries®

In 2007 alone, more than 180,000 people were referred to Goodwill® for employment services through the WIA and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. Goodwill agencies operate one-stop centers to provide skills training, job placement and job retention services to people with disabilities, welfare recipients and other job seekers. Many local Goodwill agencies are lead one-stop operators, or operators in association with other service providers, and are active

on state and local workforce boards. These workforce boards aim to offer guidance for training programs that will meet the requirements of local employers.

## Goodwill's Position

Goodwill Industries International looks forward to working with Congress and the new Administration toward a bipartisan reauthorization bill that invests in the future of the nation's workforce while helping individuals to obtain the job skills necessary to become self-sufficient and meeting the needs of businesses nationwide. Goodwill urges Congress to appropriate increased funding for the act and to improve federal support for workers by:

- Encouraging the inclusion of community-based organizations in the operation of one-stop career centers to support innovation in creating effective solutions to local and regional issues.
- Creating a separate line item for infrastructure to direct more funding to pay for training in addition to, rather than at the expense of, WIA's already inadequate existing funding streams.
- Facilitating collaborative, innovative, proactive responses to local and regional workforce and economic development issues by including community-based organizations' governance.
- Promoting employment opportunities in the green jobs sector, including recycling, computer refurbishing and green building construction.
- Supporting the delivery of quality services to harder-to-serve populations, such as individuals with disabilities, chronically unemployed people, welfare recipients, and people with criminal backgrounds.
- Preserving Projects with Industry and Supported Employment State Grants.
- Creating a dedicated funding stream to support youth with disabilities transitioning from special education into adult life.

## Action Requested

Goodwill Industries urges Congress to reauthorize the WIA this year. Among other things, the reauthorization should improve access to employment and training opportunities for individuals with barriers to work, encourage community-based organizations to operate one-stop career centers, and direct resources toward job training and services for youth with disabilities who are transitioning from special education to adult life.

## About Goodwill Industries International

Goodwill Industries International is North America's leading nonprofit provider of employment training, job placement services and other community programs for people who have a disability, lack of education or job experience or are facing economic challenges. Goodwill organizations fund employment training, job placement and other community programs by selling donated clothes and other household items at more than 2,200 Goodwill stores in the United States and Canada and online at [shopgoodwill.com](http://shopgoodwill.com). Goodwill Industries collectively reported \$3.2 billion in revenues in 2007. Eighty-four percent of collective revenues raised go directly toward supporting and growing community-based programs and services.

*For more information, contact  
Goodwill Industries International:*

*Lauren Lawson  
Media Relations Manager  
(240) 333-5266  
[lauren.lawson@goodwill.org](mailto:lauren.lawson@goodwill.org)*

*Seth Turner  
Director of Government Affairs and  
Public Policy  
(240) 333-5508  
[seth.turner@goodwill.org](mailto:seth.turner@goodwill.org)*

*Laura Walling  
Director of Advocacy and Legislative Affairs  
(240) 333-5378  
[laura.walling@goodwill.org](mailto:laura.walling@goodwill.org)*

[www.goodwill.org](http://www.goodwill.org)

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