



## U.S. ABILITYONE COMMISSION

March 18, 2016

### **Declaration in Support of Minimum Wage for All People Who Are Blind or Have Significant Disabilities**

#### **PREAMBLE**

The U.S. AbilityOne Commission<sup>®</sup>, which oversees the AbilityOne<sup>®</sup> Program, recognizes there are strongly held positions about paying special minimum wages to people with disabilities under Sec.14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. We fully understand that this affects thousands of individuals and their families. The Commission updates AbilityOne policies as necessary to align the Program with contemporary public policy, law and regulations. We pay particular attention to procurement, employment and compensation practices pertaining to people who are blind or have significant disabilities, and who are employed through the Program.

#### **STATEMENT**

Our vision is for all people with disabilities to achieve their maximum employment potential. The Commission and the AbilityOne Program must be leaders in taking action and calling for action that supports and advances opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. More than 90 percent of Program employees currently earn at least the Federal minimum wage, or state minimum wage, if higher. The Commission will now advocate for this standard to be met consistently across the AbilityOne Program.

Our call to action is for all qualified nonprofit agencies participating in the AbilityOne Program to commit to, and begin (if not maintain), paying at least the Federal minimum wage, or state minimum wage if higher, to all employees who are blind or have significant disabilities working on AbilityOne contracts.

Our ultimate goal is to foster the development and implementation of training and employment best practices that allow employees with disabilities to be compensated at the prevailing wage paid to all other employees working on AbilityOne contracts.

In making this declaration, the Commission recognizes that Federal policies have changed since the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act was passed into law in 1971. Today, the Commission and our society have higher expectations that, through increased emphasis on technology, rehabilitation engineering and other supports, people with disabilities will be able to participate as fully capable and productive workers. To remain viable, the AbilityOne Program must be recognized as effectively offering quality employment and equitable wages, including competitive integrated employment opportunities.

We envision the AbilityOne Program positioning itself as a model of best practices and an innovator of pioneering strategies that lead to compensation at prevailing wages and competitive integrated employment. We must correct the misperception that the AbilityOne Program is synonymous with payment of subminimum wage payments to people with disabilities. Accordingly, the Commission is engaging its Central Nonprofit Agencies and AbilityOne participating nonprofit agencies to develop effective strategies for all members of the AbilityOne network to achieve the goal of minimum wage, while striving to reach payment of the full prevailing wage to all AbilityOne employees.

We must continue to seek and implement innovative training and employment strategies that provide valuable job skills to workers with disabilities. We must increase education and awareness to dispel any lingering myths or low expectations. In doing so, the AbilityOne Program will be better able to highlight our government's leadership as a model employer of people with disabilities, both directly and through socioeconomic initiatives in Federal procurement.

By adopting and issuing this Declaration, the Commission renews our commitment to pursue and realize our vision.

This Declaration and call to action shall not be construed to impair or otherwise affect the authority granted by law. This Declaration and call to action does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by any party against the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, its agency, members, employees, or any other person.

