

Equal pay for women is one of the signature equality issues facing us today, and as far as I'm concerned, it's something we can never talk about enough. But what's also worth talking about is equal pay for women with disabilities, which of course is the focus of today's program. I can't tell you how impressed I am that the organizers of this event have chosen to explore the equal pay issue through the lens of disability. To some, it may seem like a unique take on the larger issue, but to me, it's a consideration that cannot be ignored.

As you hear

ensure today's workforce is inclusive of all people—including people with disabilities. So workplace equality issues facing people with disabilities are what we live and breathe each day.

In ODEP, we consider workplace equality—including equal pay—to be a basic civil right. And if you think about it, that quest for equality has been the foundation of all of the civil rights movements throughout our history. We were reminded of this last July when our nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—the landmark legislation that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin, in turn increasing access to opportunity for more Americans. And then, in 1990, that ideal of equality was renewed and expanded with the signing of the Americans with Disabilities

employers, this exacerbating barrier often results in limited access to education and training, including leadership building and work-to-learn opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships and technical education programs.

What's more is that women with disabilities are at a higher risk of violence, abuse and bullying— which is another factor that can negatively impact their employment outcomes.

ODEP and our employer technical assistance center recently co-hosted a webinar on women and trauma, and some of the statistics presented were staggering. We learned that 83 percent of females and 32 percent of males with developmental disabilities have experienced sexual assault. And that 37.3 percent of women with disabilities have experienced violent abuse in their lifetime, as compared to 20.6 percent of women without disabilities. 28.5 percent have been threatened with violence, compared with 15.4 percent of those without disabilities.

And what's the workplace connection to this shocking data? Well, trauma impacts our ability to work. It results in absences, chronic tardiness, anxiety about one's safety on the job, changes in work performance and more. So there are many compounding barriers associated with being a woman and having a disability (among other things) potentially leaving these women sidelined from opportunity.

What's clear is that efforts are still needed to address the barriers to employment and competitive pay that women with disabilities face. Luckily, solutions do exist, and I'd like to talk about a few of them today.

Solutions & Strategies

According to the research I mentioned earlier, together we can collectively adopt and implement strategies to improve the state of employment and earnings of women with disabilities.

employers and other stakeholders promote more inclusive work environments.

One of ODEP's signature initiatives is the Campaign for Disability Employment, or CDE, which is a public education campaign funded by ODEP that works to raise awareness about the value and talent that people with disabilities bring to America's workplaces.

The CDE's latest product is a public service announcement called "WHO I AM" that is airing on broadcast and cable stations nationwide. It features nine working people with disabilities and underscores a vital message—that we all have many sides to ourselves; many diverse factors that make us who we are, both on the job and off. Copies of that PSA, and an accompanying discussion guide, are being distributed today, so I hope you'll check it out. You can learn more about the CDE, as well as best practices for creating a flexible and inclusive workplace, by visiting the website WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org.

I also recommend visiting the websites of two of ODEP's technical assistance centers, the Job Accommodation Network, which you can find at AskJAN.org; and the Employer Assistance and Resource Network, whose website is AskEARN.org. In fact, the hub of ODEP's Employer Technical Assistance Center is located down the road in Albertson at The Viscardi Center, which is an incredible organization that works to educate, employ and empower people with disabilities.

You know, one of The Viscardi School's alumni is a graduate of Hofstra University, and a former colleague of mine. His name is Paul Hearne, and he was appointed to serve as the Executive Director of the National Council on Disability under the George H. W. Bush administration, among other distinguished honors. Another distinguished Hofstra University member is Dr. Frank Bowe, whom I also worked with. Frank was the Dr. Mervin

Livingston Schloss Distinguished Professor for the Study of Disabilities at Hofstra, and he had a very distinguished career devoted to disability rights. Unfortunately, both of these great men have passed away, but their contributions to the rights of individuals with disabilities have impacted millions of people's lives.

The Promise of Education

And that's a great segue to talk about the role of the educational system in combating the employment challenges of women with disabilities.

The effects of education and a successful education-to-work transition are clear. Women with disabilities with a college degree live in poverty at a far lower rate when compared to those who have less than a high school education—14 percent compared to 45 percent. Furthermore, those with a college degree see higher employment rates—49 percent—when compared to women with disabilities who have less than a high school education—19 percent. And compounding this issue is that women with disabilities have lower educational attainment than the national average.

So it's evident that educational systems and communities have a critical role to play in the transition to the work lifecycle. Educational entities—whether primary and secondary schools, institutions of higher education, like Hofstra, or leaders of vocational rehabilitation, job training, or career and technical education programs—all have an opportunity to shape the future labor force in a manner that better supports girls and young women with disabilities. With successful academic progression, transition to higher education, and clear pathways to meaningful work with competitive and livable salaries, labor outcomes can be improved.

So, what are some exemplary practices that educational organizations can embrace? The first is to start when women with disabilities are young. We must develop individual plans of action and tracks to meaningful employment for youth with disabilities and engage students in early discussions about work. We must also initiate early discussions about opportunities related to transitions, early work exposure, independent living, and disability rights—and engage students as active participants along the way.

The next strategy is to individualize. We must base transition services on the individual needs of the student and incorporate the student's interests into Individualized Education Plans. Promoting and supporting a STEM education is important here, as well. And so is formalizing linkages to other services while the student is still in school and based on an individualized needs assessment.

Educational organizations also must partner and collaborate in this area. They can partner with students, her family, programs that complement basic academics, and local and state governments to ensure success. A critical piece of this is partnerships with post-secondary academic institutions and vocational programs, and

encouraging public-private networks and leadership and mentorship initiatives that support and inform the transition from education-to-employment
And a national exemplary practice is streamlining the transition to work. Educational institutions must raise awareness about and increase opportunities for early exposure to work, leveraging a spectrum of options such as mentorships, internships, apprenticeships, career and technical education. They can facilitate easy access to information related to STEM education, post-secondary education, work-to-learn opportunities, internships and job openings, health, benefits, and services. And they can prioritize individualized transition plans and identify voc

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After several decades in the mid-20th century with little immigration, Long Island, like the country as a whole, has