

Ms. Hilary Malawer

Assistant General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel

U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Ave SW., Room 6E231

Washington, DC 20202

Re: Docket ID: ED-2017-OS-0074

Dear Ms. Malawer:

I am commenting on Regulation ID: ED-2015-OSERS-001-1167, Date Posted: Aug 19, 2016 RIN:1820-AB70 CFR:34 CFR Parts 361, 363, and 397 Federal Register Number: 2016-15980.

I currently work as a **CSR team lead** where I serve PA residents submitting applications for Medicaid, Food Stamps and energy assistance. My job at InspiriTec, an affirmative employer of people with disabilities, including veterans, offers full wages, benefits and promotional opportunities. Many of my co-workers are also persons with disabilities; however, after working here for three years and two months I see that my co-workers and I operate just as any business “typically found in the community,” with an identical focus on job performance and exceeding customers’ expectations. Yet, under the current Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) regulations and guidance, my employer may not meet the definition of a Competitive Integrated Employment setting, which means that all people with disabilities, in the future, may not have an opportunity to work at InspiriTec and earn competitive wages and career opportunities enjoyed by all of us here. It is ironic, per RSA guidance, that future persons with disabilities may not be supported if they choose to work at InspiriTec simply because many already do work here. Many of my coworkers with disabilities have expressed their sense of freedom and empowerment to reach their full potential in an environment where the focus is not on one’s disability, but rather performing one’s job. Why deny others this opportunity?

RSA guidance does not seem to recognize each person has individual needs and that a one standard metric will fail to truly measure quality of life as presupposed by the definition used to describe “integrated” workplaces. Quality of life assumptions such as community integration need to be assessed by the individual’s needs and desires and not a one-size-fits-all in an identity group mentality. Therefore, it is impossible to assign a statistical measure of “integration” using numbers such as ratios of co-workers with disabilities.

As an affirmative employer of people with disabilities participating in the AbilityOne/JWOD Program and state-use programs, InspiriTec has created thousands of jobs in the IT Help Desk and Contact Center

arena since launching in 2001. When referrals and placements from state vocational rehabilitation counselors cease, employment opportunities at my company will go unfilled. Deserving individuals with significant disabilities, including veterans, will be denied these opportunities and the ability to be a vital part of our community, unless the Department immediately rescinds the FAQ guidance (posted on the Department's website, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa/competitive-integrated-employment-faq.html> ) related to the definition of integrated settings and issues clarifying guidance that employers participating in the AbilityOne/JWOD Program and state-use programs may be considered competitive integrated employment settings.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on existing regulations that eliminate jobs, or inhibit job creation.

John Hunter