

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin,

We write to encourage the Department of Defense (DOD) to take concrete steps to increase its AbilityOne utilization. DOD has previously outlined its desire to increase AbilityOne utilization, and such steps are critical to increasing employment for people who are blind or significantly disabled.

As you know, the AbilityOne® Program is authorized by the *Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act* to create employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities by selling products and services to the federal government. More than 36,000 Americans, including 2,500 veterans, achieve economic and personal independence through this program, administered by the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (operating as the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®), an independent federal agency.

The AbilityOne Program creates significant benefits for the federal government and taxpayers. A recent study done by Mathematica finds that the AbilityOne Program creates an average \$2.66 return for every dollar spent to administer the program through a combination of increased tax revenues and decreased reliance on public assistance.

With nearly 70 percent unemployment among working-age Americans who are blind or have other significant disabilities, the need to grow employment opportunities is great. Doubling AbilityOne utilization is projected to create over 20,000 new jobs for Americans with disabilities.

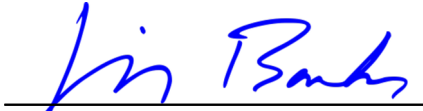
As the largest federal customer of AbilityOne, the DOD can help expand careers for these individuals by increasing AbilityOne utilization, growing the DOD procurement spending done through AbilityOne. Currently, the DOD spends 0.55 percent of its total budget through AbilityOne.

An AbilityOne utilization goal for DOD was recommended in four consecutive reports sent to Congress by The Panel on Department of Defense and AbilityOne Contracting Oversight, Accountability, and Integrity, established under Section 898 of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, including in its fourth and final report to Congress in December 2021. In addition, in April 2022, DOD voluntarily pledged to increase its utilization of AbilityOne to 1 percent by 2027.

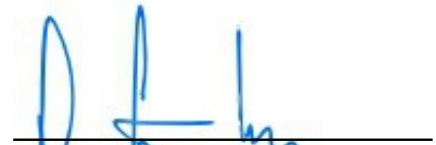
We support the Department taking real steps today to increase its utilization of AbilityOne, to support the recommendations made to Congress by the 898 Panel and the DOD's own commitment to use

AbilityOne. If the Department does not take steps to increase utilization of AbilityOne in the coming months, Congress may consider future action to increase it themselves. This policy benefits all Americans through employment opportunities for disabled Americans and veterans, allowing for greater independence and ensuring a greater return on taxpayers' investment.


Sincerely,



Jim Banks
Member of Congress



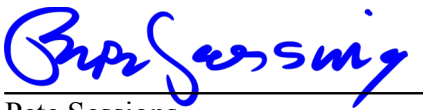
Trent Kelly
Member of Congress



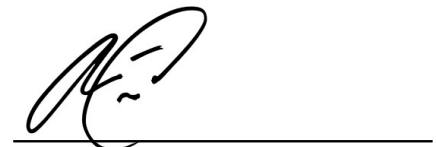
Brandon Williams
Member of Congress



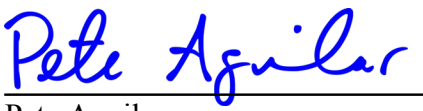
Debbie Lesko
Member of Congress




Pete Sessions
Member of Congress




André Carson
Member of Congress



Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress



Greg Pence
Member of Congress



Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress



Larry Bucshon, M.D.
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



Rudy Yakym III
Member of Congress




David G. Valadao
Member of Congress



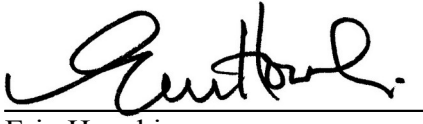
Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress



Kathy Manning
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Houchin", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Erin Houchin
Member of Congress