

# U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

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**RANKING MEMBER** *Special Committee on Aging*

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## **Sen. Casey's Opening Statement Hearing on Aging with Disabilities October 25, 2017**

“Chairman Collins, thank you for holding this hearing on disability employment. I want to begin today with an observation that I think all of us would agree with, which is all of us, in one way or another, cherish our dignity. Work also contributes to our dignity. The 12th century Hindu philosopher, Basava, referred to the ‘dignity of work’ and how work can make a person holy.

“Our hearing today will cover how laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Rehabilitation Act have helped to make work dignifying for individuals with disabilities. This hearing will also examine what more we can do so that individuals with disabilities have a fair chance to attain financial security during their working years and in retirement.

“With passage and implementation of the ADA, IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act, when you walk into a store or restaurant or ballpark it is likely you will see an employee with a disability. This is a great start toward fulfilling what the philosopher Basava said about the dignity of work.

“However, for far too many individuals with disabilities, the dignity of work is still out of reach. When the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law in 1990, workforce participation for those with disabilities was at about 30 percent. Today, that participation rate is still at approximately 30 percent.

“The jobs individuals with disabilities hold and rates of pay may be better, but the overall participation rate has not changed. And it is not for lack of desire. A 2015 Kessler Foundation survey found that over 68 percent of people with a disability want to work.

“We know that work has numerous benefits: first, it creates social networks. Second, it can be a pathway to better health, both physical and mental. Third, work provides dignity and a sense of self-worth. Fourth, it is the key ingredient to economic self-sufficiency; and finally, work benefits the economy.

“We of course need to address barriers to employment. That is one of the reasons I worked so hard, in 2014, to pass the ABLE Act. ABLE makes it possible for people with disabilities to save money and not put needed benefits, such as health care, at risk. I am pleased to report that

as of the end of the 2nd quarter of this year more than 10,000 ABLE accounts were open and more than \$37 million saved by individual account holders.

“As we break down financial barriers to employment, we must also ensure that individuals with disabilities are able to develop a strong foundation for success in the workforce. As a member of the Committee that reauthorized the Rehabilitation Act in 2014, I worked to make sure young people with disabilities get the experiences necessary to find a job. These experiences include learning soft skills, the type of skills that make it possible to have a successful interview and know how to interact in the workplace. It also means getting the chance to volunteer or to participate in an internship, or have a part-time job.

“And it also means feeling confident about one’s abilities and one’s disability. Part of doing more includes making sure people with disabilities can find good-paying jobs working with their peers who don’t have a disability. And it means benefits and supports such as home and community based services—making sure that those remain in place.

“I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about strategies and policies that will make it possible for all Americans to realize the dignity of work.

“Thank you.”

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