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Testimony for Senate Bill 1037

Hello, my name is Heidi Tuszynski I am a licensed professional counselor and past Chair of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council. I am a newly appointed member to Governor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities. I have over 20 years experience working in the disability field and 45 years of experience being a person with a disability.

My testimony on this Senate Bill 1037 is my personal experience with civil service and my personal recommendations being an individual with a disability who is legally blind and had issues with civil service testing accommodations. I am providing testimony to support Senate Bill 1037 to move some Civil Service duties over to the Office of Administration. I would also like to ask Senator Folmer and Senator Vulakovich to add an amendment to their bill to include a reasonable and fair hiring path for persons with disabilities under both non state and state civil service positions managed by the Office of Administration. I would like to see this Initiative across the board.

My personal testimony

A few years ago I applied to take an Employment Specialist test through the State Civil Service Commission. I was a person with a disability. Being so I was prescreened. To be prescreened meant that my education and experience were looked at to make sure I met the qualifications for the position before testing. A person without a disability is never prescreened. You can apply online and take your examination as early as the next day. My prescreening and my request for an enlarged test and answer sheet took three months. Three months to make a reasonable accommodation to enlarge a test and answer sheet to 16 point size.

My test was rescheduled a few times. I was first told my test wasn't sent to the testing site in Erie. Then my test couldn't be found. Then there wasn't anyone available to give me the test. Finally, when my test was found, and it was sent to Erie and someone became available to administer it, I was directed to a testing site lacking signage directing me to a room in the basement.

The proctor at first could not find my test. When he did he explained that I could not take the test because the answer sheet had not been enlarged. He made a phone call to the Civil Service Commission in Harrisburg to ask permission to allow me to circle the answers in the test book and not the answer sheet. This permission was denied.

He suggested that I reschedule not knowing that this was the fourth time that they had rescheduled due to the misplacement of the test, the test being sent to the wrong testing site, and the unavailability of a proctor.

Taking my test and answer sheet to a wheelchair accessible table, I was told I couldn't sit there. It was reserved for someone else. He placed me in a cubical with a broken light and a computer monitor I had to move to make room for my test.

No one sat at that table for the time it took me to finish the test. When I asked for a sheet of paper to aid me in using the scantron answer sheet, I was asked if I was going to use it to write a nasty letter to the commission.

It was the worst testing experience of my life. I have never felt so demeaned as a person. This process was humiliating and very unfair and I waited 3 months. This situation has happened to many other people in the disability community. People who were totally blind we're not allowed to use a screen reader because each testing site is not equipped with a screen reader called Jaws. Testing sites should be accessible both physically and programmatically to align with the ADA. Please don't allow these injustices to continue. People with disabilities have hopes and dreams and deserve an opportunity for state government employment. In no way am I asking for unqualified people with disabilities to be given jobs. I am asking you to please give a person with a disability an opportunity for an interview. Please consider an amendment to create a fair and reasonable hiring path for persons with disabilities.

Thank you for the time and consideration you give my testimony and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Heidi M Tuszynski MS, NCC, LPC