

Good morning Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, and distinguished Senators. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today about a cause that I am passionate about.

My name is Ron Frank. I have been an employee at Walgreens for 27 years and have been a store manager for 20 years. My current position with Walgreens is Store Manager for the 29th Avenue store in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and Community Leader for stores in Cedar Falls, Waterloo, Mason City, and Waverly. I am here to tell you about employment of people with disabilities from my perspective as a retail store manager and community leader for Walgreens, a 111 year old retail pharmacy chain that started with one store in Chicago. Walgreens has grown into the country's largest network to meet America's health and daily living needs, helping people Live Well, Stay Well, and Get Well. With almost 8,000 stores in all 50 states plus Puerto Rico, we are central to most of our nation's communities and their healthcare needs. From day one, this company has valued employees and viewed them as the key asset of the company to achieve our goal of providing a superior customer experience.

With the ADA anniversary upon us, Walgreens understands the need for enhancing employment outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities.

Our company has a long history of employing people with disabilities and has focused on it as an intentional goal in the past seven years. The Committee is aware of the story of how our distribution centers are inclusive of people with disabilities from Walgreens Senior Vice President Randy Lewis' testimony before this committee last year.

My Walgreens store in Cedar Rapids, Iowa has pioneered efforts for enhancing employment outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities through programs partnering with Goodwill of the Heartland and with Sportability of Iowa.

My Walgreens store has been partnering with Goodwill of the Heartland to provide a job skills training program, allowing job seekers with disabilities to gain both classroom knowledge of the retail environment and job seeking skill development including real hands-on experience in a retail setting for the past four years. The Community Based Retail Training Program is an 8 week course offering retail skill development. Goodwill of the Heartland has a 120 hour curriculum combining classroom and sales floor experiences. Students learn from my staff by working with them in all aspects of the store including how to set-up a cash register drawer, ring up a sale, and give correct change. Money handling skills include not only cash and coin, but also credit and other electronic cards, and check writing. These skills are taught in a classroom setting at my location and reinforced side-by-side with the Walgreens staff and customers. They learn how to do these jobs, not just by watching but by working on the registers, stocking the shelves, cleaning the store, and providing customer assistance. I meet individually with students to discuss and teach about what it takes to get a job and keep a job, from the application process and interviewing and keeping a job after they have been hired. The funding for this program comes from Vocational Rehabilitation. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation supports job seekers in

this training to help determine their skills and job interests. The program began at my store almost five years ago and since then we have started the program in Waterloo, Waverly, Dubuque, Des Moines, West Des Moines, Iowa City and Ankeny in Iowa as well as in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Walgreens has opened its doors to people who typically experience barriers to employment by welcoming these job seekers and training them in today's world of work. Over 18 people have been hired at Walgreens in the Cedar Rapids/Iowa City area alone as a result of this training. Participants of the training program have also been hired as stockers, greeters and cashiers at Casey's General Store, Goodwill Stores, HyVee, Fareway, and Cinema 16 Theaters. My experience with this program has proven to be successful in offering opportunities to those with disabilities to gain the skills needed for employment as well as benefitting the employees, the community, and Walgreens. People with disabilities are truly capable if given a solid program that not only supports them in gaining skills, but expects them to gain those skills.

A personal passion of mine is adaptive sports and so I have also partnered with Sportability to give young people with disabilities the opportunity to participate in sporting activities. I have helped to organize and participated in wheelchair basketball fundraiser games at the local high schools in our communities. The games include both people with and without disabilities to increase awareness and provide funding for the adaptive sports equipment needed for youth with disabilities to have the same opportunities and benefits of sports as those without disabilities. I have also volunteered at a weeklong adaptive sports camp at the University of Northern Iowa. I have personally seen the looks on the faces of the youth who participate in sporting activities for the first time and it has impacted me on a personal level as well. I started a program to raise money for the adaptive sports equipment needs by creating sponsorship packages for businesses. I am very passionate about sports being available for youth with disabilities, because I have seen firsthand the difference it can make in an individual's life and employment skills. A good example is a young man, now eighteen years old, who was introduced to adaptive sports through the adaptive sports camp I have volunteered for. This young man was always interested in sports, but was only allowed to be a "manager" for teams at school. Since his first camp experience, three years ago, where he was introduced to many adaptive sports including track, he has earned a state title in three wheelchair track events and was the first high school student in the United States to compete in a State Cross Country meet in a wheelchair division last year. His confidence has blossomed in all areas in life and he currently has a part time job and a possible opportunity for a scholarship at a four year college. He also participated in several job shadows in the community and a paid work assessment at my store through Systems Unlimited. His future is bright but without this opportunity to experience support and success in athletics along with his and his parents' dedication and determination to travel across the state to be able participate in those opportunities; his future may look different today. Sporting opportunities in Iowa and across the country are limited for individuals with disabilities, partly because the lack of sporting equipment and that is something I am trying to change.

Young people with disabilities have limited opportunities to participate in group and individual sports due to schools', camps' and leagues' lack of adaptive equipment. Adapted sports participation provides an opportunity for young people with disabilities to become and stay physically fit and healthy. Later on sports benefit individuals with and without disabilities because the skills gained, such as social skills, problem solving ability, the ability to be an effective team member, along with an increase in self confidence, match some key skills needed for many gainful employment opportunities.

We can enhance employment outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities by ensuring that they have opportunities to learn skills that are marketable in today's labor force and have as many opportunities as possible to gain the soft skills that other youth get through athletics and intramural sports. Agencies, schools and other supports for students and young adults with disabilities must be aligned with local business needs. They must believe that their students and clients can acquire the skills and manage the jobs that require those skills. These institutions must demonstrate the expectation that tomorrow's future disability leaders have the potential to add value to an employer as an employee, not as a charity. The best way to accomplish this is to have the agencies know how to and be able (and expected to) partner with business in their community to understand what is needed and establish the connections and knowledge to develop such skills. One of the reasons that my store's program is so successful is the relationship between myself and the leaders at Goodwill. They have asked good questions and responded to my feedback to ensure the program is robust and relevant.

At Walgreens, we believe that some of the things that can help are simple and some are more complicated. Very simply the expectation that people with disabilities can and will acquire skills and have supports to be competitive in today's workforce is the first step. Outcomes versus process are true indicators of the success of programs. Performance metrics should be high reaching and also assume that people with disabilities can and will compete with others in the job market as long as supports are provided. And finally the system should support the notion that companies can benefit from the contributions of people with disabilities within their operations. As long as the pipeline is filled with qualified candidates with disabilities, we can certainly ensure opportunities for them.

People with disabilities need to add value to a business as an employee, otherwise it isn't employment, it is charity. Certainly it is nice to give a person with a disability a chance, but if we want that opportunity to be sustainable, the paycheck must be earned. And it should be earned, people with disabilities can have tremendous skill sets and capabilities, however they may need supports and opportunities to acquire them or to demonstrate them. Across the Walgreen Company, we have found great value in employing people with disabilities, and certainly in my store, my community's stores, and in other Iowa stores we see that value and help develop it through partnerships with groups like Goodwill of the Heartland. Iowans with disabilities are definitely demonstrating their value and capability every day.

This concludes my prepared remarks, I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you and be well.