The National Association for the Employment of People who are Blind

PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE REPORT

SUBMITTED BY DAN KELLY

BOARD MEETING, July 29, 2024

Public Policy Forum Summary Report:

This year's NIB/NAEPB Public Policy Forum was very successful, with great guest speakers and training held prior to our congressional meetings. There were approximately 120 meetings on Capitol Hill. Thank you to our Public Policy Forum Planning Committee for the great work.

At the Tuesday Afternoon Public Policy Training sessions many agencies participated in a Roundtable Exercise focused on improving NPA public policy engagement. We asked the following four questions and because of your great work we were able to identify some themes to focus on to help improve everyone's experience over the next year.

(1) What is the greatest barrier that prevents you or your organization from more active participation in support of our public policy agenda at the federal level?
(2) What concerns you most as you go to Capitol Hill to discuss the utilization goal?
(3) What one thing could NIB do to help you in our collective advocacy work?
(4) How do we encourage all producing agencies to actively engage in federal advocacy?

Summary of Common/Shared Themes:

- Lack of time/busy schedules, and cost.
- Being new to advocacy and need additional basic training around advocacy and legislative process (simpler one-pagers and other resources).
- More training on how to explain any issue/ask, and express what happens if we secure the ask?
- Localizing and personalizing issues and having NIB and NPAs being more involved locally.
- Survey/find out why non-participating NPAs aren't showing up and engaging in advocacy.

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- get to the right people in the congressional offices that represent them. We might get pushed into a meeting with a HELP person for example but need to be talking with their defense person on a specific issue.

NDAA activity:

1% Utilization goal:

Although we were not successful in getting a 1% provision for AbilityOne added to the National Defense Authorization act (NDAA) we were able to educate many members on the important work of the AbilityOne program and get many members on record supporting growth initiatives for the AbilityOne program. Sign on letters from Representative Amodei and Banks garnered 25 congressional member sign-ons and the introduced Amodei amendment had a dozen co-sponsors. Thanks to everyone for their hard work in making this all happen.

Veterans Contracting Preference at DOD:

An amendment was successfully included in the House passed version of the FY 2025 NDAA to create a contracting preference for Veteran-owned small businesses (VOSBs) within DOD, and this raises major concerns and seems to be nearly identical to the challenges AbilityOne faced with the Department of Veterans Affairs not too many years ago. We sent a joint NIB/NAEPB letter to the leaders of both Armed Services Committees expressing strong concern and asked that the amendment either be changed or dropped going forward, explaining how this provision could be very harmful to jobs within our community. The letter is attached to this report for the record. Fortunately the Amendment was not included in the Senate Armed Services Committee version of the bill and we are focused for the next quarter on ensuring the provision does not make it through conference into the final legislative package. Work is ongoing to this end; however, we have completed the following:

Opposition letters sent to all HASC and SASC members

Opposition Letters sent to co-sponsors of the legislation

Joint and NIB Meetings held with HASC and SASC staff

Opposition Letter templates drafted for NAEPB NPAs to send to their congressional delegation

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National council on Disabilities (NCD):

In May we reported out on a letter we sent to NCD correcting the record on their many misstatements and inflammatory rhetoric presented in both their 2020 report calling on Congress to abolish the AbilityOne Program as well as their April letter to the Armed services Committee opposing the 1% AbilityOne utilization goal. As a part of our letter, we also asked to meet to discuss our differences and to see if we could find a common way forward. I was pleased that both SourceAmerica and NIB held meetings with NCD in June. And, although these initial introductory meetings with the new Chair Claudia Gordon did not lead to any substantive change in positions on anyone's part, the only way to ever get change is to keep talking. Chair Gordon explained that in her new role she is in listening mode, and she is open to continued dialogue. She also invited AbilityOne to share any additional information or data that's new. We will absolutely take her up on her offer.

National Policy Collaborative:

Many members of NAEPB have discussed the need to improve collaboration with other nationally recognized blindness organizations. I was pleased to join a membership re-introduction call in early June with NPC members. The National Policy Collaborative is an organized group of national entities dedicated to advancing educational, employment and health equity opportunities and civil rights for people who are blind or have low vision. There has been turn over in leadership within many of these member entities and it was valuable to meet many of the new leaders in our field and to quickly share the top public policy initiatives each organization is working on in 2024. Common themes circled around access, employment, and social security Disability. We are looking forward to holding a in person meeting with the NPC in Q4 of 2024 to go deeper to see how we can support each other's initiatives heading into 2025. For your reference the below list of entities is represented as a part of the NPC.

- ACB, American Council of the Blind
- ACVREP, Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals
- AER, Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
- AFB, American Foundation for the Blind
- APH, American Printing House
- BVA, Blind Veterans' Association
- NAEPB, National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind
- NFB, National Federation of the Blind
- NIB, National Industries for the Blind
- Prevent Blindness of America
- VisionServe Alliance

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