

**PROMOTING COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS FOR
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

HEARING
OF THE
**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS**
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

EXAMINING PROMOTING COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS FOR
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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FEBRUARY 27, 2014
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PROMOTING COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2014

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m. in room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Tom Harkin, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Harkin, Murray, Casey, Franken, Baldwin, Murphy, Warren, Alexander, and Scott.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HARKIN

The CHAIRMAN. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will come to order.

Today's roundtable discussion will focus on how students with disabilities are accessing and succeeding in post-secondary education. This roundtable marks our sixth in a series to examine issues we plan to address in the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and our review of this topic could not come at a better time.

According to just released research by the Pew Research Center, the value of a college education has never been greater. No matter how you measure it, young college graduates do significantly better than their less-educated peers. College graduates earn higher salaries. They are more likely to work full-time, and they are less likely to be unemployed than their peers who do not attend college.

Today, the income disparity between college graduates and those with a high school diploma is wider than at any time since this comparison was first tracked in 1965.

So as this committee examines how to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all Americans, we must remember to include our fellow citizens with disabilities to ensure they have access to post-secondary education and to succeed once enrolled in those programs. To provide those opportunities, we need to understand the barriers students with disabilities face, and the services and supports that facilitate their success.

Post-Secondary education is a primary goal for more than 80 percent of high school students with disabilities. Sixty percent of young adults with disabilities enroll in post-secondary education, compared to 67 percent of young adults without a disability; so it is very close. Among those who enroll in college, 41 percent graduate compared with 52 percent of those without disabilities; so the

gap widens. We must better understand why students with disabilities are more likely to dropout and what will attract them to both enroll and to keep in school so that they are successful.

There is a great deal of diversity in the population of college-age students with disabilities today, and the accommodations that are required to meet their needs are just as diverse.

A blind student may need printed materials in different formats. A deaf student may need interpreters or captioning services. A student with physical disabilities must be able to navigate the campus. Students with psychiatric disabilities may need confidential counseling and flexible timelines for coursework completion to accommodate the often episodic nature of their disabilities. And students with intellectual disabilities need inclusive, on-campus college programs to facilitate their continued learning, and their successful transition from high school to post-secondary education. Once students with disabilities arrive on campus, we need to ensure they have the supports and services necessary.

So what should be the Federal role in promoting success of college students with disabilities? Our panel of experts, who have joined us today, will shed some light on that question. We will hear from those closest to this question, program administrators and students themselves. The students will share some of the barriers they have faced, successes they have achieved, and the supports and services that may have helped them along the way. And, of course, I hope that all of you here will provide us with suggestions. I read your testimonies last night and I see that you do have some.

The young people with disabilities who now are attending post-secondary programs are part of what I keep calling, "The ADA Generation." They have grown up with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which promises them the kind of access and opportunity denied to people with disabilities in the past. They have been educated alongside their nondisabled peers. They know that post-secondary education can open doors for them, and they want their fair shot at the American dream. So I am eager to hear from each of you about your experiences and what we need to do in the Higher Education Act to support the success of students with disabilities.

Our goal is to have an open discussion here; a roundtable discussion, rather than a formal, on-the-dais kind of thing. So we will have a good, open discussion on this.

Now I invite Senator Alexander for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALEXANDER

Senator ALEXANDER. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Harkin has been, and is, the leading member of the U.S. Senate in his concern for Americans with disabilities, and so that makes this hearing especially important, not just to him, but to all of us who are here.

We welcome you here. He and I were talking a little earlier. We looked at the format here and we were trying to figure out how we could get closer. We are not trying to separate ourselves from you. We would like to actually be closer, but we could not figure out a logical way to do it, but we would like to have more of an informal atmosphere to this. We do not want it to be a hearing; we want it to be more of a discussion.

About 10 percent of our college students have a disability. That is a lot of Americans; that would mean, maybe 40,000 students among Tennessee's 400,000 college students. So we are talking about the concerns of lots of students.

A great many of our higher education institutions are already distinguishing themselves as places that are attractive for students with one kind of disability or another.

I know that when I was president of the University of Tennessee, I heard regularly from parents and students about the program at UT Chattanooga, which is called MoSAIC and it supports students with autism, and it includes credit bearing courses, academic life coaching, peer and faculty mentoring.

But word travels among families and students who are dealing with a particular disability and they search out those campuses that are friendly and inviting, which is one of the great advantages of our system of higher education because of Government support. About half our students have a grant or a loan from the Federal Government to help them go to college that follows the student to the institution of their choice. So a student with a disability can select a college campus that is a friendly environment.

Vanderbilt has a 2-year nonresidential certificate program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities called Next Steps, and that includes individualized programs for social skills, physical fitness, and job skills.

Senator Harkin has proposed some changes in the Vocational Rehabilitation Act to make the process of going from high school to college easier and that, we hope, finds its way into law through the Workforce Investment Act. So what we are doing here today are hearings about the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and we want to make sure that as we do that, we are sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities. We look forward to hearing your advice about how best to do that.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Alexander.

Now, let me introduce our panelists who are here. I will go down the line and then we will ask each of you to give a brief statement.

First we have Melissa Emrey-Arras, Director of Education issues in the Government Accountability Office, the GAO, Office of Education, Workforce, and Income Security team. She has led national studies on education issues ranging from student loans to veterans' education benefits. Prior to coming to GAO in 2001, she worked at a private sector consulting company and led projects on Medicaid and child welfare issues for State and local clients.

Our second witness is from the State of Maryland, and that would be Laysa Ostrow. Ms. Ostrow is a Ph.D. candidate at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and co-executive director of the Lived Experience Research Network. Ms. Ostrow's research, advocacy, and writing are focused on improving mental health and social services particularly addressing innovative practices in financing models and promoting the voice of multiple stakeholders. She will share with us her experiences with both the psychiatric system and the Social Security disability system as they interact with higher education for someone with a psychiatric disability.

Then we will hear from Ms. Fink. Dana Fink is an assistant project coordinator at the Institute for Educational Leadership Center for Workforce Development. In this role, she supports the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth and D.C. Advocacy Partners. A graduate of the University of Illinois and while there, I am told, she was a two-time wheelchair basketball national champion—well, all right—and an Academic All-American. Ms. Fink also served as a summer intern on the HELP committee and we welcome you back here. Maybe you did not think you would come back as a witness, but nice to have you back.

Our next person is from South Carolina, and I am going to turn to Senator Scott for the purpose of introduction.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR SCOTT

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am very pleased to introduce William Farrior as one of our witnesses today. Mr. Farrior is 26 years old from Ravenel, SC in the Low country, and he has worked very hard to now be a senior at the College of Charleston. I am looking forward to being your graduation speaker this year. I am sorry for you, by the way.

[Laughter.]

William is an inspiring example of the great things that can happen when each and every student is given the chance to realize his or her full potential.

William was diagnosed with Asperger's when he was in the eighth grade, which has created many challenges for him. After he graduated from high school in 2006, he had a tough time at a community college due to his disability and to death in his family.

When school did not work out, William found himself drifting between entry level jobs. Thankfully, William was able to enroll into the REACH program at the College of Charleston which has now opened up a whole new world of possibilities and opportunities for an amazing future that you will have.

William has now had the opportunity to intern at Blackbaud, which is a fantastic company in the Low country of South Carolina, at the YMCA, the YWCA, and in public relations at the Medical University of South Carolina, just to name a few, which has done amazing things in helping him to hone his skills to prepare him for a career in his chosen field of communications.

Mr. Farrior, his testimony today, will show us all the importance of giving every student, every young person a chance to reach their full and highest potential, and to help us engage in a broader conversation about ensuring access as we move forward on a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. William, thank you for being here, sir.

Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Scott, and we welcome Mr. Farrior.

Next, we will hear from Ms. Elizabeth Getzel, the director of the "ACE-IT in College" program at Virginia Commonwealth University, another one of the TPSID programs that we just heard about at the College of Charleston. TPSID stands for Transition and Post-Secondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. It is much easier to say as TPSID. TPSID was part of the reauthor-

ization of HEA in 2008. With my other hat, as the chair of the Appropriations subcommittee, we have been funding TPSID for the past 5 years. I am anxious to hear about both of the TPSID programs.

Ms. Getzel's research includes effective strategies for the inclusion of college students with disabilities, career planning, and preparation. She has authored or co-authored numerous journals articles and co-edited a book entitled "Going to College: Expanding Opportunities for People with Disabilities."

Our final witness is Katherine Myers, associate director of the Office of Disability Services at Wright State University. I read a lot about Wright State last evening. Wright State University has a long history of providing high quality services and supports to its students with disabilities. During her 19 years at Wright State, she has been responsible for running the technology center, which provides textbooks and course materials in alternative formats, as well as a variety of other computer-related adaptations. Ms. Myers has also worked closely with students who use communication devices.

We have a great panel of experts and people who have experience with our topic. What I would like to do is ask you to make short statements. I have all your statements. They will be made a part of the record in their entirety. Can you give us a brief statement about what you think is the most important thing that you want us to know, and then we will just start discussing things. OK?

Ms. Emrey-Arras, go ahead.

STATEMENT OF MELISSA EMREY-ARRAS, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, WORKFORCE, AND INCOME SECURITY ISSUES, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, BOSTON, MA

Ms. EMREY-ARRAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Alexander, and members of the committee for inviting me to participate in today's roundtable discussion.

My remarks today will summarize GAO's prior work on this important topic.

As Senator Alexander mentioned, national data shows that just over 10 percent of post-secondary students have disabilities. Common disabilities include mental health conditions, attention deficit disorders, and mobility impairments.

Based on our interviews with students, parents, and school officials, the transition from high school to college can be a challenging one for those with disabilities. Many students with disabilities are accustomed to certain accommodations while they are in high school. As Senator Harkin mentioned, there are various things that can be done to assist with the learning process.

Oftentimes, students go to campus for the first time expecting those accommodations that they were used to, to already be in place because that is what they have had all along, and they are quite often surprised when those are not already there for them. While colleges are, in fact, responsible for providing reasonable accommodations for students, students really do need to initiate the process when it begins at the college level. And to do that, they need to first self-identify as having a disability, and then obtain

updated evaluations to support their request for a disability accommodation, and then officially make that request.

Some students may choose not to disclose their disabilities initially. They may do so perhaps later on in the semester after they have fallen behind, which can create issues for them. Others may have trouble obtaining updated evaluations. It can often be costly to obtain updated evaluations, and there can also be long waits for appointments. So those are additional barriers that students face in transitioning to college and receiving those really critical accommodations for their learning.

In our work, we did find that schools were reaching out to students and their parents to help them learn about their rights and responsibilities regarding the accommodation process. And we also did find cases of schools actively helping students obtain lower cost evaluations. Some of them were using the resources on campus in terms of their mental health facilities, their departments of psychology and the like, to provide those kinds of evaluations on campus for students to assist them in obtaining the needed documentation to get their requests in order.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Senator Alexander, and members of the committee. This concludes my formal remarks. I am looking forward to today's discussion.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Emrey-Arras follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MELISSA EMREY-ARRAS

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Alexander, and members of the committee, for inviting me to participate in this roundtable discussion on promoting college access and success for students with disabilities. My remarks today will summarize GAO's prior work on these students as they navigate the transition to post-secondary education. The work upon which this statement is based was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. To conduct this work, GAO analyzed Federal survey data from the National Post-Secondary Student Aid Study, and conducted interviews with agency officials, school officials, students, and parents. Further details about the scope and methodology can be found in each of these related products.

- Our prior work has noted that the overall population of post-secondary students with disabilities appears to have increased, rising to 11 percent of students. About a quarter of students with disabilities have reported having a mental, emotional or psychiatric condition. Other common types of disabilities reported by post-secondary students include attention deficit disorder, mobility impairments, and learning disabilities. Demographically, we found that students with disabilities closely mirror students without disabilities, but are slightly more likely to attend college part-time.

- Two Federal laws protect the rights of students with disabilities in post-secondary education—Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). The Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination by institutions of higher education that receive Federal financial assistance, such as Federal financial aid. The ADA covers a broader range of schools, including State and locally funded and private-sector schools.

- Regarding enforcement of these laws, the Department of Justice can pursue any complaints it receives alleging discrimination under the ADA, regardless of the funding status of the respondent. The Department of Education can pursue complaints filed against schools receiving financial assistance from the agency at the time of the alleged discrimination. The Department of Education also provides grants and technical assistance to support students with disabilities in the transition to college.

Our prior work has identified several key challenges faced by students with disabilities, as well as post-secondary schools:

- **The Transition to College Poses Challenges for Students and Schools.** The transition from high school to post-secondary school presents challenges for students with disabilities because they must assume more responsibility for their education. In contrast to elementary and secondary school, they must identify them-

selves as having a disability, provide documentation of their disability, and request accommodations and services from their post-secondary institution. According to our work, this transition can be overwhelming and difficult for students to understand. Schools also face challenges related to this. Many schools proactively conduct outreach to students with disabilities and their parents to inform them of their rights and responsibilities, but reaching all students is difficult. This can become problematic if students request accommodations after classes have begun, as they may have fallen behind academically, and accommodations can take time to put in place.

- **Students Also Reported Challenges Documenting their Disability to Obtain Accommodations.** Many students with disabilities are accustomed to certain accommodations or adaptive technologies and begin college to find they are not automatically provided for them in college. In many cases, colleges require updated disability evaluations conducted by qualified professionals. These evaluations can be costly and there may be long wait lists for appointments, which can cause delays for students who must wait for accommodations. Some schools reported providing assistance to students in obtaining evaluations at lower cost.

- **Three Student Populations May Create Additional Challenges for Schools.**

(1) *Veterans with Newly Acquired Disabilities:* Many veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from conditions such as traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder, which are difficult to diagnose. Symptoms may not surface immediately after such injuries, but may instead manifest themselves once these students have already begun classes.

(2) *Students with Intellectual Disabilities:* Students with intellectual disabilities—such as developmental disabilities or autism—are a population that schools believe will increase in the coming years. These students often require more specialized services that schools typically lack experience in providing, and may also need additional classes to address life skills, financial skills, or employment training.

(3) *Students with Mental Illness:* Students with mental illness usually require multiple supports, and colleges may have difficulty coordinating accommodations and other benefits to support them. These students, whose disabilities are less visible, may also be among a group that chooses not to disclose their disability or seek accommodations until classes have already begun, resulting in service gaps.

- In recent years, GAO has made recommendations to several Federal agencies, including the Department of Education, and the Department of Justice, to address some of these challenges, for example, by improving coordination among Federal agencies providing services and strengthening enforcement efforts related to testing accommodations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, this concludes my remarks. I am happy to take any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ostrow.

STATEMENT OF LAYSHA OSTROW, MPP, Ph.D., CANDIDATE, STUDENT, JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, BALTIMORE, MD

Ms. OSTROW. Thank you so much for having me here today.

I can briefly summarize my written testimony. I was first in an inpatient psychiatric unit when I was 14-years-old and labeled with bipolar disorder and had multiple psychiatric system involvements after that.

My freshman year of high school, I was in public school and my parents were asked to take me out because of my disability. From there, I was in several different high schools, eventually ending up in a residential treatment facility for girls with emotional and behavioral problems. I was there for 2½ years and technically graduated from my public school with very little actual education in high school.

From there, I went to a private 4-year university in Massachusetts. I was integrated into a normal college setting. I am able to secure accommodations because I have had neuropsychiatric test-

ing in high school having been a special education student. It is often, as Ms. Emrey-Arras said, more difficult for collage students to do that at that time if they have not had that testing in high school because of the resources that are required, or not wanting to disclose, or seek accommodations because of discrimination.

In graduate school, I founded the first national support group for graduate students with psychiatric disabilities and from there created the Lived Experience Research Network, which is a student mental health service users survivor-run organization to support students of psychiatric disabilities.

I found through my personal experience and my advocacy and research that despite the challenges I faced, there are many far more widespread and really disheartening experiences that people with psychiatric disabilities face in the education system, in the higher education system, and in high school, and as far as graduate school as well.

These students often face discrimination, self-stigma, a public stigma, fear of stigma from faculty, and from administrators, and other students that prevent them from requesting accommodations. They may not even be familiar with their rights as people with disabilities.

So based on my experiences, and advocacy work with other students, I would recommend three areas in need of attention in terms of policy.

The first would be policies that facilitate grassroots organizing by students for independent, mutual support and self, and systems advocacy.

The second would be institutional policy change including education about accommodations tailored to students with psychiatric disabilities. It can also be very different because they are, “invisible” disabilities.

The third would be ensuring confidentiality and privacy in campus counseling centers, oversight of involuntary leave policies to prevent schools from dismissing students based on mental health problems, particularly suicidality. And critical investigations of consequences of stigmatizing policies that come from increasing student surveillance.

The role of institutions of higher education is to facilitate intellectual growth of students, not punish them for their struggles. As we saw in a recent “Newsweek” article that the students are being penalized for suffering and not supported in pursuing education. I think the mental health problems should be somewhat separated from the education as education is a right for all of our citizens.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ostrow follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LAYSHA OSTROW, MPP, PH.D. CANDIDATE

My name is Laysha Ostrow. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and the co-executive director of the Lived Experience Research Network. I was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit for the first time when I was 14 years old, and labeled with bipolar disorder. In high school I was in a residential treatment facility for girls with emotional and behavioral problems for 2½ years. As an undergraduate I was able to secure accommodations primarily because of neuropsychiatric test results obtained as a secondary school student. This kind of testing is often unavailable to college students who first experience problems after high school. During my junior year of college I took a medical leave for depression. When I tried to return to school, I was discouraged from pursuing higher education

by university clinicians, leading me to drop out. Subsequently I was declared permanently disabled and was on SSDI. I finished my Bachelor's degree when I was 26. Because of these experiences and experiences of colleagues, I co-founded the only national support group for graduate and doctoral students with psychiatric disabilities in 2011. Through participation in the group I became aware of even more widespread and often devastating discrimination and lack of support at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. My organization's Discrimination in Higher Education research and advocacy project has further documented the degree of discrimination and marginalization that students all too often face, as has the recent *Newsweek* headline story *How Colleges Flunk Mental Health*. Research confirms these reports: in a national post-secondary survey, for example, over 50 percent of students reported discrimination or stigma in the process of requesting accommodations. Researchers working in higher education have noted that few universities have the expertise or experience to support students with psychiatric disabilities, even though this group is one of the largest disability groups in higher education.

Based on my experiences and advocacy work with other students I recommend three major areas in need of attention: (1) policies that facilitate grassroots organizing by students for independent mutual support and self- and systems-advocacy; (2) institutional policy change, including education about accommodations tailored to students with psychiatric disabilities; (3) ensuring confidentiality and privacy in campus counseling settings, oversight of involuntary leave policies to prevent schools from dismissing students, and critical investigations of the consequences of stigmatizing policies to increase student surveillance.

The role of institutions of higher education is to facilitate intellectual growth of students—not punish them for their struggles. Education policy should not be focused on us as sick members of society needing treatment, but individuals with disabilities with a right to education and employment.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you and it is very profound. Thank you very much.

Dana Fink, please.

STATEMENT OF DANA FINK, ASSISTANT PROJECT COORDINATOR, INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. FINK. Good morning, Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Alexander, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this critical topic with which I have personal and professional experiences.

First to note about me is I am a person with multiple disabilities. I have had my physical disability since birth, as well as an anxiety disability acquired during college.

Since graduation, I have worked to support transition paths for youth with disabilities into post-secondary education and the world of work. My current role, as you mentioned, at the Institute for Educational Leadership, I support a technical assistance center aiming to better serve all youth, including youth with disabilities, and a program training families and self-advocates to influence policy for people with disabilities throughout the District of Columbia.

It is through these experiences that I have seen young people with disabilities be unable to obtain necessary services and supports throughout transition. It is with these supports that we know they can and will become contributing members of their communities, but without them, prospects are grim.

I am also very proud to be a 2010 graduate of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. There was always an expectation in my family that I would graduate and go on to college, just as my two older sisters had before me. But in looking at some of the universities that they attended, it became clear that they could not provide the supports that I would need to be successful.

A recent National Longitudinal Study by the Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP, showed completion rates for students with disabilities at 34 percent compared with 51 percent in the general population. Of those who lacked, reasons were varied, but included cost, poor grades, changing schools, and not getting needed services. I know that it is only due to the supports and services I received at my university that I was a part of that 34 percent.

I was fortunate to be accepted into the University of Illinois, receiving a scholarship to play on the school's wheelchair basketball team, one of four such opportunities for women in the U.S. Illinois has been a leader in accommodations for students with disabilities since Dr. Nugent founded the university's disability student service center in 1948 ushering numerous firsts for students with disabilities since.

I look forward to having an opportunity to share with you many of these best practices with the committee today, as well as some of the barriers that I have, unfortunately, seen faced by many of our Nation's brightest and most hardworking individuals with disabilities that have been unable to see success in post-secondary education and on into the world of work.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Fink follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DANA FINK

Good Morning Senator Harkin, Senator Alexander, and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this critical topic with which I have personal and professional experiences. First to note about me is that I am a person with multiple disabilities. I've had my physical disability since birth as well as an anxiety disability acquired during college. Since graduation I have worked to support transition paths for youth with disabilities into post-secondary education and the world of work. In my current role at the Institute for Educational Leadership, I support a national technical assistance center aiming to better serve all youth, including youth with disabilities and a program training families and self-advocates to influence policy for people with disabilities throughout the District of Columbia. It's through these experiences, that I've seen young people with disabilities be unable to obtain necessary services and supports throughout transition. It is with these supports we know they can and will become contributing members of their communities, but without them, prospects are grim.

I am very proud to be a 2010 graduate of University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. There was always an expectation in my family I would graduate and go on to college, as had my older sisters prior, but in looking at universities they attended, it became clear they could not provide supports I would need to be successful. A recent National Longitudinal Study by Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs showed completion rates for people with disabilities at 34 percent compared with 51 percent in the general population. Of those who left, reasons were varied but included, cost, poor grades, changing schools, and not getting needed services.

In high school, I researched schools to fit my needs and enrolled immediately in Georgia vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. I was told by my assigned VR counselor I was not a candidate for services because my disability did not have direct impact on my desired career choice, which at that time, was journalism. When my mother asked what would happen if I wanted to be a tap dancer, I was told instantly that would qualify me for services. This obviously did not sit right with us and through research we discovered the Client Assistance Program through which I was able to seek a more qualified VR counselor. I repeated this process again when my counselor was unable to support me going to an out-of-state school. Unfortunately, this lack of awareness from VR is a story that I've heard too many times and most students and families are not aware that they can appeal the process so they miss out on what allowed me to be successful in college.

I was fortunate enough to be accepted into the University of Illinois, receiving a scholarship to play on the school's wheelchair basketball team (one of four such opportunities for women in the United States). Illinois has been a leader in accommodations for students with disabilities since Dr. Tim Nugent founded the university's disability student service center in 1948, ushering in numerous firsts for students with disabilities. This scholarship was a financial burden lifted for my family; but I had other costs, specifically related to my healthcare needs, so I established eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid which provided me with necessary healthcare coverage, while simultaneously limiting my asset limit to \$2,000. Without my scholarship, attending an out-of-state university would have been an impossibility, even with programs like Ticket to Work and the Plan to Achieve Self Sufficiency plans aimed at alleviating this issue. Additional issues cropped up with SSI limitations when I tried to participate in learning experiences such as study abroad and out-of-state internships. For me, SSI played a strong role in helping me achieve my educational goals; however, for too many young people it becomes a life-long parking lot.

Despite the barriers illustrated, more and more students with disabilities are enrolling in post-secondary education and discovering a higher education system not ready to accommodate them. We're seeing students who don't know their rights when they are no longer getting IEP services and understaffed, underfunded disability student service centers are more focused on legal compliance than supporting students in college and future employment.

Again, I was fortunate to attend my university where the disability student center had so many of the supports I and my peers needed to be successful including: assistive technology, note taking, priority registration, testing accommodations, interpreters, tutoring, and onsite clinical psychologists. The academic accommodations at Illinois do not stop on campus. All their online and distance learning classes are automatically captioned. Their comprehensive commitment to inclusion also applies to career transitions services. Staff saw higher education as a stepping stone toward gainful employment, hosting workshops on disability disclosure and employment issues, providing career assessments, and bringing in organizations seeking employees and interns with disabilities. Unfortunately, this level of commitment to serving students with disabilities is not the case in far too many of our Nation's colleges and universities.

Access at Illinois also included access to the other components that make up a true college experience, including recreation, study abroad, integrated housing accommodations, transportation, and healthcare. I got a top-notch education and, because of these supports, I left college prepared for work and independent living.

If I could sum up a few recommendations for the committee to consider, I would encourage:

- Working with existing Federal and State programs to provide students with disabilities an even playing field to afford college including creating clarity with asset limitations and opening minority and diversity scholarships up to students with disabilities, arguably the most underrepresented minority in higher education.
- Starting transition programming earlier so students are knowledgeable of how their rights and responsibilities will change in higher education and what services are available to them.
- Improving disability student services with increased staff and better integration into other areas of universities such as career center, tutoring services, and study abroad offices.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to share my story today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Dana. Thank you very much. Welcome back.

Mr. Farrior, welcome. Please proceed.

**STATEMENT OF WILL FARRIOR, STUDENT, COLLEGE OF
CHARLESTON, CHARLESTON, SC**

Mr. FARRIOR. Good morning, Chairman Harkin, Senator Alexander, and other committee members.

I must say what an honor it is here to be talking to you this morning. My name is Will Farrior. I am a 26-year-old College of Charleston senior at the College of Charleston's REACH program. I major at the College of Communication.

A disability that refers to my uniqueness is called Asperger syndrome. In elementary school, I was able to function like everyone else. In fifth and sixth grade, my parents started to see red flags that included, excuse me, 7 hours of homework as well as observing my interaction with peers and adults. In eighth grade, I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome.

My experience at the REACH program has been an amazing one for several different reasons including my professors, job opportunities, and social activities. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to learn more about my uniqueness by being able to take Introduction to Psychology and Interpersonal Communications which has given me a better understanding to grasp and explain to others.

The part I enjoy most about being in the program is that I have been able to take a variety of courses that have led me to my passion and field of choice. These classes include Introduction to Education, personal finance, public speaking, women and gender studies, strategic communications, business ethics, event planning, and many others. These courses eventually helped me to enhance my strengths and understand my weaknesses.

For example when I was younger, I would ramble on and on, I would never pick up on body language, or be more concise when talking to others.

The two things that are the second most marvelous part of being in the program is the job opportunities and social activities that come along with it. In order to graduate from the program, I must do some internships. The internships include the admissions office, Blackbaud, YMCA, Metanoia, Communities In Schools, and Medical University of South Carolina's public relations office. While having the chance to work with a variety of jobs, I was able to discover what direction I want to steer my career, which is youth.

My social experience at the College has been an amazing one, as have my job opportunities. I have been able to change and grow by being more aware of how to interact with people along with participating in multiple organizations and jobs that are part of the campus. These include summer orientation intern, Alpha Kappa Psi Business Fraternity, mascot, Ambassador, resident hall assistant, and member of the Charleston 40 Tour Guide Association.

Overall, my years at the College of Charleston's REACH program have been the best years of my life. The simple fact is that I have been able to grasp my uniqueness while teaching and learning from others around me. Also by being part of this program, I am able to be more confident knowing that I can find a career that I love and can make a difference.

Thank you and it is a privilege.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Farrior follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILL FARRIOR

Good morning Chairman Harkin and Senator Alexander and other members of the committee. I must say what an honor it is to be here talking to you this morning. My name is Will Farrior and I am a 26-year-old senior at the College of Charleston's REACH program. My major at the college is communications. I am originally from Brooklyn, NY but was raised in a small town called Ravenel, SC about 45 minutes outside Charleston. My disability that I refer as to my uniqueness is called Asperger Syndrome. Between the age of 6 and 10 I was just like your average child and student making A's and B's while participating in extra-curricular activities. These include Cub Scouts and sports. During the transition stages of me

going to different schools my parents started to recognize certain signs of me struggling in 5th and 6th grade. The red flags that brought this attention toward them included doing homework from 5 p.m. to maybe 12 a.m. or 1 a.m. as well as observing my interactions with peers and adults.

Eventually, I went to numerous doctors who tried to figure out what my actual situation was. It was not until my 8th grade year that I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. The Doctor told my parents that I do not have ADD or ADHD. Now, I always knew there was something different about me, but I never could figure it out until I got into my late teens.

I graduated high school in 2006. The following spring semester of my first year in college at Trident Tech, was the most dramatic year of my life because my father died a month later after my birthday. During that semester I could not seem to concentrate on academics or anything else. While going through a lot I eventually got a full-time job which turned out to be the night shift at Charleston Air Force Base as a custodian. Then after working with them for about 2½ years, I switched over to Super Wal-Mart as a stocker in dairy just for about 7 months. My life then changed when I learned about the REACH program.

My experience at the REACH program has been an amazing one for several different reasons, including the professors, job opportunities, and social activities. During freshmen year I was so fortunate to have the opportunity to learn more about my uniqueness by being able to take introduction to psychology and interpersonal communications. The professors Dr. May and Dr. McGee were able to give me a better understanding of my uniqueness to grasp it and explain it to others who never met me before. The part I enjoyed most about being in the program is that I have been able to take a variety of courses that have led me to my passion and field of choice. These classes include introduction to education, personal finance, advanced personal finance, introduction to business, public speaking, women and gender studies, graphic novel, strategic communication, business ethics, event planning, and many others. These courses eventually helped me to enhance my strengths and understand my weaknesses. For example when I was younger I would ramble on and on and I would never pick up on body language, or be more concise when talking to other individuals.

The two things that are the second most marvelous part of being in the program to me is the job opportunities and social activities that come along with it. In order to graduate from the program I have to do seven internships which don't start until your second semester. The internships that I have been able to enjoy are in the Admission office, Black Baud, YMCA, YWCA, Metanoia, Communities In Schools, and the Medical University of South Carolina's Public Relations office. While having the chance to work with a variety of jobs, I was able to discover what direction to steer my major and career toward in the near future. The career path I have chosen is to work with youth from ages 11 and up by helping them make a smooth transition from middle school to high school then to college or whatever direction he or she may choose to take.

My social experience at the College of Charleston has been just as amazing as my job opportunities. For example being here I have been able to change and grow by being more aware of how to interact with other people along with participating in multiple organizations and jobs that are part of the campus. These include being the first REACH student to be a Summer Orientation Intern, Alpha Kappa Psi Business Fraternity member, College of Charleston Mascot, College of Charleston Student Ambassador, REACH Ambassador, Residence Hall Assistant, Nominee for Homecoming King and member of the Charleston 40 Tour Guide Association.

Overall, my years here at the College of Charleston's REACH program have been the best years of my life. The simple fact is that I have been able to grasp my uniqueness while teaching and learning from others around me. Also having been part of this program I am more confident knowing that I can find a career that I love and can make a difference.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Farrior. Are you graduating this spring?

Mr. FARRIOR. Yes, sir. I graduate May 10, 2014.

The CHAIRMAN. Good for you. OK.

Senator ALEXANDER. Senator Scott is his graduation speaker.

The CHAIRMAN. Oh, he is?

Senator ALEXANDER. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. So you are giving the commencement address there, eh?

Senator SCOTT. Unfortunately for him, yes, sir, I am.
[Laughter.]

Congratulations.

Mr. FARRIOR. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, make sure you single him out.

Senator SCOTT. I will do that.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Getzel, welcome. Please proceed.

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH EVANS GETZEL, PROJECT DIRECTOR, ACE-IT IN COLLEGE, VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY, RICHMOND, VA

Ms. GETZEL. Thank you.

It is a privilege to be here today to discuss the access to post-secondary education for students with disabilities. I have been in the field of higher education and disability since 1979, and have worked to research and demonstrate effective strategies and supports for college students with disabilities.

I am the project director of ACE-IT in College, which is an academic and employment preparation program for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Our university is 1 of 27 Transition and Post-Secondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, or as Senator Harkin said, TPSID. These are model demonstration programs that were authorized through the Higher Education Act.

Colleges and universities are seeking models of support for all students entering their campuses. Peer mentoring or mentors who provide academic support are not uncommon. Internships, cooperative education, or other work experience-based programs are an integral part of all college students' experiences preparing them to compete in the global economy.

These same types of supports are being used throughout the TPSID programs to provide opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities whose access to higher education is extremely limited.

Model demonstrations pure to TPSID's are creating opportunities for students to develop interests and skills for lifelong learning, build a successful resumé through internships and paid employment while on campus, and enter integrated competitive employment settings as a result of these experiences. The combination of knowledge and skills students gain through these demonstrations can serve to enhance their future employment options and lifelong earnings.

For me, a young woman named Susan, one of our most recent graduates, comes to mind. Susan earned a special diploma and had limited work experience while in high school. She was very clear when she entered ACE-IT in College that her career goal was to work with children. She took courses in early childhood education, worked part-time at our University's child development center, and worked as an intern at a local elementary school.

The coursework and experiences she gained helped her to develop a strong resumé, making her more competitive in the workforce. Susan's experiences echoes the experiences of many other students with intellectual disabilities attending college programs across the country.

I look forward to talking further about some of the recommendations that we would like to discuss with you in terms of the continuation of these particular programs because we see them as vital for this particular population that typically has limited access to many experiences that other individuals are able to have.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Getzel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH EVANS GETZEL

Employment rates for all individuals with disabilities can range from 34 percent to 39 percent in comparison to the employment rate of 76 percent to 79 percent for individuals without disabilities. For individuals with intellectual disabilities, the rate of employment has declined over the past 5 years. In 2008, the rate of employment was reported at 28 percent, while recent numbers show it is anywhere from 18 percent to 23 percent. The downward employment trend in this population will not improve until new ways are found to meaningfully integrate these individuals into the labor force.

We know that higher education can lead to a variety of personal and financial benefits for all individuals seeking to learn new knowledge and skills. Advanced learning can lead to improved outcomes for all individuals; but the impact of higher education on individuals with disabilities is particularly evident. Individuals with intellectual disabilities who participate in any post-secondary education experience (not necessarily earning a degree or certificate) are employed at double the rate of those with just a high school diploma. Based on national data gathered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, young adults with intellectual disabilities who participated in post-secondary education were 26 percent more likely to exit their vocational rehabilitation program with employment and earned a 73 percent higher weekly income.

In 2008, Congress created a new model demonstration program, the Transition and Post-Secondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSIDs) and an accompanying National Coordinating Center. These programs began in 2010 and were awarded to institutes of higher education that sought to demonstrate and validate this emerging pathway to increased integrated competitive employment and lifelong learning. Prior to 2008, there was no guidance provided to the field of higher education and disability on programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The data collected from the 27 Transition and Post-Secondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID) by the National Coordinating Center provide the first national picture of how students with intellectual disabilities can attend college and derive the same benefits sought and achieved by other college students. Since its inception in 2010, the percentage of paid jobs held by TPSID participants while in college increased steadily from 30 percent to 36 percent, with the majority of these individuals earning minimum wage or higher. Close to half of these students with paid jobs had *never* worked prior to attending their TPSID program. When compared to the previously stated low employment rates, students with intellectual disabilities who attend college far exceed these rates, clearly demonstrating that post-secondary education is a viable pathway to employment.

We know that all students with disabilities can benefit from participating in college with the right supports and accommodations, and students with intellectual disabilities are no different. We are at a critical juncture for the continuation of the Transition and Post-Secondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability. These programs are about increasing the employment and the long-term earnings of students with intellectual disabilities. In the past 3 years, data from the 27 programs are showing increased access to paid employment, internships, and college coursework that can lead to better employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Continued funding is necessary to expand and sustain access to inclusive higher education in 2- and 4-year colleges, universities and technical schools. It is important that research is conducted to discern both the long-term fiscal impact on higher education institutions, as well as the potential reduction in Federal assistance program dependency as a result of these opportunities.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Getzel.

And now we will finish up, Ms. Myers. Welcome. Please proceed.

**STATEMENT OF KATHERINE MYERS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES, WRIGHT STATE UNIVER-
SITY, DAYTON, OH**

Ms. MYERS. Good morning, Chairman Harkin, and Ranking Member Alexander, and members of the committee.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to be here this morning to talk about higher education.

To understand Wright State University and what we do now, it is important to have a little bit of our history. The University is quite young. We were established in 1967. The Office of Disability Services was established in 1970 as a result of the receipt of a TRIO Grant to start the program.

It started out in a dorm room in the only dorm that we had on campus. This was before anything was mandated by law. We already had students with physical disabilities on campus because the first building that we had was actually built with a flush entrance. So that actually helped to get the first student with a physical disability on the campus.

As a result of that, a commitment started to provide services to students with disabilities. Over the years, as our population has changed, we have increased the services and increased our staff. We are very fortunate that our commitment is from our top level support. We have very strong support and have had since the inception of the department, support from our president, our provost, and we are with student affairs, and under our vice president of student affairs. So we have very strong support within the University.

As a young University, the faculty that we had at that time also as they were growing with us, they grew with the Department of Disability Services. So they were also very much for what we were doing and helped us with providing our accommodations.

We have adjusted our accommodations based on our population. When we got our first students with learning disabilities and our first students with blindness is when we established our tape center to tape record textbooks into audio formats for our students.

When I arrived about 20 years ago—it will be 20 years in May—I was in charge of the tape center and also in charge of the adaptive technology on the campus. We were reading textbooks at the time, but it did not take very long for us to get our first request for a scanned book by a student with a physical disability who could not manipulate his textbooks. He needed to be able to access them on his computer, so we started doing scanned books for him.

Then we had—I will never forget the day—we had a student named Brock, who came into the office who was using our tape recorded books. We also used a service from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. If they had the books, we did not actually produce them ourselves; we ordered them from them. And he came in asking if we had read the book for psychology. He had a physical disability. What was preventing him from succeeding in his classes was his attention deficit disorder. It was so significant for him that he had a very hard time flipping the tapes over constantly for the 4-track tapes from Recordings for the Blind. Unfortunately, we had not read the book. We had gotten it from them. However, we had

scanned the book and it was a very rough scan. It was not cleaned up. It had not been edited yet and I offered that to him.

A few days later he came back in and he said, "For the first time, I have been able to study for more than 15 minutes at a time." The student went from a very marginal C student to an A/B student who graduated with honors from Wright State, went on to get his master's degree, and then complete his Ph.D. That told me we were on the right track.

One of the things as part of our history, too, is the establishment of the AHEAD organization. In 1977, the first conference on disabled students on American campuses was held at Wright State University. The attendees of that conference formed the Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Post-Secondary Education. In 1992, the organization was renamed to the Association of Higher Education and Disability, also known as AHEAD. This is the organization that we use to help us with our guidelines as to what kinds of services that we do and the documentation that we need. They have done an excellent job of assisting in that realm for us, so that we actually have guidelines to follow.

The program has gone from, in 1970, being in a dorm room with one person, to an office suite in our student union with seven professional staff, three support staff. Our professional staff includes a psychologist who works on assessing students if needed. She also has three School of Professional Psychology practicum students that are under her, and help with testing students, and provide some mental health counseling. We also have one graduate student for the technology center.

So our growth is great. We have gone from providing just test proctoring for students to providing test proctoring that includes extra times when needed, computers with both adaptive hardware and software. And then we also have note-taking programs for students within the classroom, interpreters in C-Print when needed for our students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Our technology center provides textbooks in alternative formats that include CD's for them to listen to, text files that they can put on their computers to listen to, or a PDF file so they can just look at the materials, and Braille. And we do all the formats of Braille, which include the regular Grade 2 contracted Braille, computer Braille, foreign language, math, and music.

It is a great privilege to be here and to share our recommendations on the things that we would like to see happen. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Myers follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KATHERINE MYERS

At Wright State University, we provide services to approximately 650 students with disabilities. Nationally, roughly 11 percent of college students have disabilities and 6 percent request services. Much like other college or university campuses, the fastest growing group of students with disabilities is those students on the Autism spectrum and those with mental health-related diagnoses. For our students on the Autism spectrum, we have developed an academic coaching program. We hire upper-level undergraduate and graduate students to be mentors; we train them how to work with a student on the spectrum, and assign them to new incoming students who need improvement in key skill areas. The students can meet with their assigned mentor up to 10 hours per week, working on "soft skills," such as time management and organization. They might also work on establishing relationships with

professors and roommates, as well as forging new friendships. We are planning to expand this program in the future to include students with mental health-related disabilities.

Other services we have available to eligible Wright State University students registered with our office include: test proctoring (which includes extended time), private testing rooms, computers, speech-to-text software, screen reading software, screen enlargement software, document cameras (for enlarging paper exams or handwritten notes), scribes, readers, four-function calculators, in-class assistance, and copies of notes from peers in the classrooms. We have a comprehensive Technology Center for the production of textbooks and other printed class materials in alternative formats. These formats include audio CDs or MP3 files, text files for the students to use with their screen reading software, enlargeable PDF files for students with physical disabilities or those with visual impairments, Braille (including math Braille [Nemeth code], computer Braille, contracted Braille, foreign language Braille, and music Braille), and raised line image enhancement.

The Office of Disability Services is not the only location on campus providing services to students with disabilities. The Biology Department has an adaptive biology lab for students who need extra assistance completing their labs. Campus Recreation is in charge of the adapted recreation program, which includes adapted skiing and bowling, and wheelchair basketball. There is a National Science Foundation grant directed by a research professor; the program is designed to encourage students with disabilities to go into the STEM fields. This program includes an Ability Advisor, who works one-on-one with the students in STEM majors, professional mentoring, as well as its own Choose Ohio First Scholarship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, when it comes to working with students on the Autism spectrum and those with mental health disabilities, we do not have all of the answers. We need technical assistance in what accommodations and supports are appropriate, both academically and socially. With that kind of assistance, we would be better prepared to help these students to be successful in obtaining their college degrees.

Additionally, although our Technology Center utilizes a textbook clearinghouse called AccessText for the majority of our books needing an alternative format, this service only provides titles for approximately 60 percent of our textbooks. Students who purchase electronic books from publishers or the bookstore usually cannot get them to work with their text-to-speech or screen reading software because of the graphic nature of the books. Disability Service providers really need the publishers to be pushed to provide accessible electronic books. I would encourage the committee to review the Department of Education's AIM (Accessible Instructional Materials) Commission's report and print access issues in Higher Education.

There also needs to be a greater push for Universal Design for Instruction that would include funding to train faculty on different teaching methods that would create accessible course content for all students. If courses are planned & designed to be accessible, it would reduce the amount of work needed to provide our students with the basic necessities for their courses. Instructors are increasingly utilizing, if not completely relying on web-based communications. The Department of Justice is currently engaged in rulemaking focused on accessible web design and I encourage that those regulations be given a priority. Last, there is a dearth of data on college students with disabilities. I would recommend that tracking the number of students with disabilities being served be included in the IPEDS Census.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you all very much. Again, we are going to try to make this as a general discussion. If people want to just break in, kind of break in; I will not do recognitions, just kind of jump in.

I am just going to kick this off. Ms. Myers, I just said that I read about Wright State last night. I never heard of this school before. So I was reading about all of this last night.

How big is Wright State now? Tell us.

Ms. MYERS. It is about 17,000 students.

The CHAIRMAN. Seventeen thousand.

Ms. MYERS. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Now, what you are doing there is phenomenal. I do not know that it is being done anywhere else. You have this Office of Disability Services.

Ms. MYERS. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. You are doing all this stuff. Does that not cost a lot of money?

Ms. MYERS. Yes, sir, it does.

The CHAIRMAN. Now, how did you get your board or whoever runs your school, the college president, how did you convince them to provide for this?

Ms. MYERS. We started out funded for the first 21 years through TRIO Grants.

The CHAIRMAN. What?

Ms. MYERS. Through TRIO Grants.

The CHAIRMAN. Oh, TRIO Grants. Yes.

Ms. MYERS. And at that time, when we lost our TRIO Grants in 1994, our director at that time went to the administration and to the State. The first one was to the administration to make sure that we were a line item in the University's budget. When we had the TRIO Grants, we only had two of our staff members who were funded through the University, so the entire, all of our salaries then became funded through the University.

We also went to the State and worked with some of the other schools within the State to get a line item in the State budget for disability services for the other schools. So there is actually a formula based on the types of services, the amount of services that you provide, and some of the services that are above and beyond what most schools would do.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, you do more than I have ever seen, anywhere.

Ms. MYERS. Those extra services include an adaptive lab for our biology program. We also have National Science Foundation Grants. One is for a STEM program to encourage students with disabilities to go into STEM fields. So we seek out grants.

We also, the University has a philosophy that whatever we have spent over our budget, they will support.

The CHAIRMAN. Now, all the rest of you, you have heard about Wright State? Is that your experience with the schools you went to also? Am I missing something? I mean, did they have that kind of support services for all the students with disabilities? I do not think so, but I do not know.

What was your experience? It seems like there are all kinds of support systems built-in to Wright State. Everything from recruiting to accommodations for textbooks, accommodations even, I understand, for living arrangements.

Ms. MYERS. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. You even have people there to help students with disabilities in terms of personal assistance during the day. Is this true at your schools too, Ms. Ostrow?

Ms. OSTROW. Obviously, I am speaking on behalf of students with psychiatric disabilities. I think the issues are a bit different and although resources are often associated with more success in many domains of life, there are some things that money cannot buy like compassion.

I would say in my experience and in the experience of other students that I know through our networks, sometimes it is the informal accommodations as in talking to a professor or an advisor or

administrator that are more helpful for students than the formal ones, obviously in terms of psychiatric disabilities.

So while I have gotten extended test taking time or a separate room, and those things do take resources, sometimes it is the ability to work from home, or to make my own schedule, or take out extensions that I negotiate with a professor directly that make more of a difference in my life than a separate room to take a test.

The CHAIRMAN. What we have done in the past in these kinds of roundtables, if you want to jump in and say something, take your name like that, that way I know if you want to jump in and say something. Well, there you go. That is what I mean. OK. Ms. Getzel.

Ms. GETZEL. I think you raise an important question. Support services for college students with disabilities do vary a great deal, even within a State they can vary a great deal.

And so it is, I think, that most accommodations that universities and colleges provide are sort of some of the standard accommodations: extended time, taking tests in areas where there is no distraction and things like that.

So there are universities and colleges in all States that, I mean, Wright State has had a long history, and I have known about Wright State for many, many years and they definitely are a leader in this area. There are other schools that are leaders as well, and we need to learn more from these leaders because there is such a variety.

What we tell students and which is so critical during the transition process to college, is that they really need to look at what services and supports are provided to find the right match, to really look at what is available, not only in coursework, but also in terms of supports. And to talk to students with disabilities who have attended various colleges to really get a very, very good idea of that.

So with all students going, you want to find the college that has the programs or courses that you want. With students with disabilities, they have the extra responsibility of looking at what kinds of services and supports that they will need to be successful.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Fink.

Ms. FINK. I have been fortunate to have visited Wright State and it definitely is a rare gem among universities. I can say the same for my alma mater, the University of Illinois, which had so many of the supports that I needed to be successful. Things like assistive technology, note-taking, priority registration for your classes so you can put them around what might be a challenging schedule with healthcare concerns, testing accommodations, tutoring, onsite psychologists, those sorts of things.

Those accommodations did not stop on the campus either. All of their online and distance learning classes were captioned and audio described immediately, so anyone who wanted to do remote classes could do that equally well.

And then I think something that is common both for Wright State and for the University of Illinois is that comprehensive commitment to inclusion that applies to clear transition services, seeing post-secondary education as that step onto the world of work. Things like workshops, having workshops on disability disclosure in the workforce. Having career assessments through your dis-

ability service center or working with some of the career transition services to work collaboratively with disability student services; it is something that I know Wright State does and I know Illinois does as well. Bringing in organizations that are looking to recruit interns or employees with disabilities, so that is really going that next step beyond accommodations in school to accommodations in school that will then help you to be successful further in life.

The CHAIRMAN. Later on.

Senator Baldwin, did you have something you wanted to interject, before I call on Mr. Farrior?

STATEMENT OF SENATOR BALDWIN

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps just broadening the question, this is very much on point with the question you raised, to talk about the transition between high school to college, and what institutions of higher learning can provide at that moment.

I was reviewing what is happening in my home State of Wisconsin, and there are two campuses of the University of Wisconsin system, Whitewater and Oshkosh, that have looked at this transition from high school to college by deciding to host a targeted summer transition program. At the UW Whitewater campus, it is open to any student with any type of disability, and the program enrolls about 65 students annually and consists of two college courses for six credits, peer mentors, social activities, access and training to adaptive technology, and intensive case management.

As I understand it, the National Longitudinal Transitional Study notes that students with disabilities are graduating college at a national rate of about 34 percent from 4-year degree programs. This UW Whitewater program is lifting that up to about 48 percent in 6 years.

But I am wondering what your thoughts are from your variety of experiences about transitional models to help increase the success at the higher educational institution.

The CHAIRMAN. Anybody? Mr. Farrior, did you want to get involved in that or Ms. Myers? I know you still wanted to have an interjection here. I saw your card up. What did you want to say?

Mr. FARRIOR. Just to go along with what these ladies have said is actually true. They do actually have their services on a variety of campuses. But it is my understanding, from my perspective, helping students that are transitioning as from my orientation end time perspective, they do have the accommodations. There is one woman that actually needed the assistance for her residence hall being that she was blind, and had a seeing eye dog, and they made accommodations for her to live in an all-girls residence hall. And they actually—it is just an to-each-his-own campus that allows students, when they do register early, the option to register early, as when they get accepted, they make appointments to speak with the staff services, so.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Myers, did you have a specific response to Senator Baldwin?

Ms. MYERS. Yes, sir. I do.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, sure.

Ms. MYERS. Transition from high school is very difficult for a lot of students, and it is something that we recognize, and we do actively recruit students. And we have tried working with some of the high schools to see if there can be better transition for them. And we have also sought out a number of grants to help us get into those high schools to help those students and establish some summer programming, which we have not been successful in doing.

But one of the things that we do because we know that that transition is difficult, our students who we consider to be our greatest at-risk students, we do some extra programming for.

We actually have an academic coach program where we hire upper level and graduate students to work with incoming students, particularly on the autism spectrum. We know that they have a very difficult time, especially socially, and dealing with the soft skills, the time management, getting their homework done because nobody is telling them to do that.

The coaches can work with a student up to 10 hours a week to provide them with support, and this is a program that we are wanting to expand and looking to do to expand to our students with psychiatric-type disabilities in the very near future.

We also, because of the limitations that we have with student employees as far as being able to do the coaching part, there are students particularly with attention deficit disorder and some of our multiply-disabled students. We do what we call one-on-one support. We target them when we do their pre-service interview as students that we need to meet with on a regular basis.

One of our staff members will then meet with the student, usually weekly during their first semester. If they are doing really well after their first semester, we start spacing that out to every 2 weeks, so that the student eventually becomes more independent.

This gives us constant contact with the student, so we can better know if they are having trouble. They are more likely—because they are actually establishing a relationship with someone—because some of these students are hesitant to do that. They need to have someone that they can count on to actually be their counselor that they can meet with all the time, and not be thrown from one person to another to another. This counselor helps to make sure that they are actually plugged-in to our services, along with plugged-in to the tutoring services, our writing center, the other services that we offer on the campus to all students.

That is a difficult piece and really needs to be addressed, and worked on a much more intense basis.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Ostrow.

Ms. OSTROW. To answer your question about transition, I think there are at least two groups of students here.

One is those students, like myself, who had disabilities in high school and then are transitioning as students with disability to college. And the other are people who start experiencing difficulties in college, and there are very different challenges there, I think, for students who are coming from a high school, and is already disabled. There is more the internalized shame and stigma that they can experience transitioning to college.

For students that start having problems in college, it is maybe not knowing what it is that they have to do in terms of what docu-

mentation is required, which can often be extremely onerous, and facilitating those kinds of interactions. I would think decreasing the burden on students of documenting a disability, like having to go through for psychiatric disabilities, or the mental health system in order to get educational accommodation does not make that much sense to me.

On the issue of sort of targeting at-risk students, that can be perceived very differently by people or, in fact, be carried out very differently. There is a lot of stigma about violence in people with mental illnesses, especially now and especially on campuses. As one of those students, I do not particularly want to be targeted by the school administration or mental health counselors. That just increases anxiety and paranoia, which can lead to more difficulties in educational achievement. But at the same time, I do think it is helpful to have someone consistently there that you trust that you can seek guidance from, whether it is a peer, or a faculty member, or someone in the counseling center, or just disabled student services.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Ms. EMREY-ARRAS. Just to piggyback off of what Ms. Ostrow was saying about populations that may have disabilities for the first time when they go to college.

I think it is important for us to think about veterans coming back from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of them coming back with sort of those invisible wounds of traumatic brain injury, PTSD, and having those disabilities in an academic setting for the first time.

In our work, we did find that some schools are providing services specifically for the veteran population. Some have mental health counselors that are trained in those issues to specifically treat veterans. And we have made recommendations to the Department of Veterans Affairs to help share best practices amongst colleges to serve that population.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Fink.

Ms. FINK. I think programs like what you have mentioned are critical for all students, including students with disabilities, but also in particular, for students with disabilities, transition cannot start when we turn 18. This is a burden in the school systems and looking at some of our current systems like voc rehab and Social Security to look at where that transition process can start when we are 14, 15. It should not be when I am trying to look at schools and saying, "Oh, this is where my sister went to school. It is not going to work for me. What do I do now?" And that actually was something that we have seen really delay a lot of the educational practices of students with disabilities who end up having a larger gap process in between high school and college.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Ms. GETZEL. There has been a lot of research, and demonstration, and work around transition. And we know that academic preparation and understanding of what the higher education system is like. There is very little communication between higher education and secondary education. They are two different systems.

What happens with students coming out of high school with disabilities, if they do not understand that what they were entitled

through IDEA is now ended, and they go into an eligibility process now in terms of what the accommodations are, that the accommodations at college are for access. And just the whole notion of what types of supports they need.

We have been running a program since early 2000 and it is ACE-IT in College. We have been adapting this model for a number of years. We have worked with students who have cross disabilities. They are college students coming to us for those supports that they need in terms of above and beyond what they are getting from a disability support service. We work very closely with them. But we have been working with veterans. We have been working with a variety of students.

Again, it comes back to an understanding of what that transition means, and we focus a lot on that big transition which is very important, to be knowledgeable families to have transition planning. We feel that the whole transition planning for post-school outcomes should begin in middle school and even started to be discussed in elementary school all the way up. And that should be for all students, but in particular students with disabilities because they do end up at 18 saying, "What am I going to do? What is happening?" So it is very, very critical for that.

We have found that students that come to us for support are unaware of how their disability impacts their learning, and what they do need. And self-determination is a very big movement now going through secondary education to really know all parts of you. Too often, students are only known by their disability label, which is unfortunate and not looking at their skills and abilities. And we are finding this especially with students with intellectual disabilities, but it does run the gamut with students.

And it is very important to look because supports and services do vary so widely across post-secondary institutions that it is so important for students to really look at what that transition is, "Do I have the academic preparation? What are the supports and services?" and really get a good grasp of that. We call that our first big transition.

The second big one is getting out of college, and retention and graduation rates, especially for students with disabilities, is not that great. We need to continue to improve that. We looked at what some of the causes are, and some of the causes are the lack of available services, or financial difficulties, or personal issues, that kind of thing.

So when we looked at our ACE-IT in College and did a study with students with learning disabilities, and ADHD, and we have also done it with traumatic brain injury, we found that that type of support along with all the resources on campus, many times, students do not know what is available to them on campus.

But I think one of the things that distresses me the most is that we really need to be working with students with disabilities, in particular, to really work on strengths, interests, and what are those accommodations or supports they need. Because when they come to us, we say to them, "What are your strengths?" and oftentimes these students are dumbfounded to list it. If you say, "What do you believe are your weaknesses?" I mean, they can say those things right away.

We want to look at a holistic picture of these particular students. And when we say, "How does your disability impact your learning?" oftentimes there is a difficulty in understanding that.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. FARRIOR, did you have something you wanted to add to this?

Mr. FARRIOR. Actually, I have to agree with Ms. Getzel because from my transitioning, I have gone throughout from school to school to school to find what works for me. It goes along when you said you have to go middle school, I feel like it needs to start in elementary, roughly about fourth to fifth grade because when you are making that transition from elementary to middle school, you are trying to figure out where do you fit and where do you belong? Where is your voice, where you can advocate for yourself, because not everybody is going to have that support system.

The CHAIRMAN. That is right.

Mr. FARRIOR. So that is where you need to start; the earlier, the better.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, I am sorry. Ms. Myers.

Ms. MYERS. To piggyback on what Ms. Ostrow said about students with psychiatric disabilities, it is important for students to understand who knows what their diagnosis is. One of the things that we have done at Wright State is it is all centralized in our office. We emphasize to the students that the knowledge of their disability is confidential.

We do not reveal to faculty, if they call us about a student, what the disability is. We will confirm what the accommodations are for that student, and students do have an accommodation sheet that they can show their faculty. And we encourage students to get to know their faculty on a personal level, be visible to their faculty, go to them during office hours. They do not have to tell them what their actual disability is, but to try to talk with them about it, about themselves and the things that they actually have difficulties with, so that they also are learning how to self-advocate for themselves.

We will step in whenever we need to. If we need to set-up a meeting between the student and the faculty, go with them if they are concerned about actually talking to a faculty member on their own, so that they can actually get buy-in from their faculty about the kinds of needs that they have.

Then the other thing is what Ms. Getzel was saying about transition beyond college. We actually have a vocational support coordinator on our staff who works with students and starts talking to them at the very beginning about internships.

One of the things that we have seen with students with disabilities is they do not have the same opportunity to build their resumé as a lot of other students do. They are not apt to even go to McDonald's and flip hamburgers. Some of them do not have the ability to do that, so how are they going to build their resumé, and especially build it within the area of their interest.

So we work with them and start looking at internship opportunities. We work with the Workforce Recruitment Program that is for Federal employment. We actually have a job fair at our University that is strictly for individuals with disabilities, and they are all employers who are actually looking to hire people with disabilities.

And again, they do not know what the disability is. A lot of it is non-obvious, but they know that the people who are coming into that career fair actually do have a disability.

We work with the students on mock interviewing. We actually have a company that came in, has started working with our students in the last month, coming in and doing mock interviews with quite a few of our students to help prepare them for these kinds of things.

We work with them on their resumé. We work with our career services department at Wright State as well, within the kind of employment type opportunities they have. And their job fairs and the workshops that they do, so we are not duplicating effort, but trying to make sure our students are included in those, and that they know that they are welcome to go there.

They understand when it is appropriate to identify disability and it depends very much on what the disability is. Sometimes you do not have to identify. That is not an issue and we want the students to understand, "If you do not need accommodation, you do not necessarily need to identify your disability." Having that ability to work with them helps a lot.

We feel in our University that if a student comes in and we do not work with them on building those kinds of skills so that they can go to work when they leave us, and that includes technology, as to what kinds of things they need, we have not done our job right if they cannot be able to be hired when they leave.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Casey, something that you wanted? I am sorry, Ms. Ostrow, you wanted to add something before I call—

Ms. OSTROW. I would certainly like to applaud efforts by the Federal Government and the private sector for initiatives to hire people with disabilities. I was encouraged to not finish college, so I guess I feel like our day has come because if employers want to hire us, then we need to graduate.

At the same time, I do not think we can emphasize enough that there is a lot of heterogeneity between schools and between States. I think some of the things you were talking about are wonderful, but not available everywhere.

In the context of disclosing with a psychiatric disability, yes, you do not need to disclose to disabled student services or faculty if you do not have an accommodation. At the same time, institutions of higher education, not just education but communities, where you want people to know you, to know who you are, and what you are about. And for a lot of people, that is identifying to some extent with having a disability, or what your story is, or what you bring to the table, again, in this context of employment for people with disabilities. But there are risks there and you have to know the environment.

I think it would be great if all of our schools were safe for people with disabilities to disclose, to be open about our identities and what we can bring. But sadly, that is not the case.

The CHAIRMAN. As we continue this discussion, this is all good information, keep in mind, what is our role, what is the Federal Government's role? What do we need to do in higher education?

In 2008, in that last reauthorization, we put in the TPSID program, and then we funded it. I did not know there were 27 of the programs out there. Mr. Farrior, you are in one of those also.

In our new reauthorization, what should we be thinking about?

Senator ALEXANDER. And if you could add to that, have you run into anything on your campuses that the Federal Government is doing that makes it harder for you to provide the kind of services and support that you would like to support? This is a good time. Sometimes we unintentionally do things like that.

The CHAIRMAN. Did you have something too, Senator Casey?

STATEMENT OF SENATOR CASEY

Senator CASEY. I do.

Mr. Chairman, first of all, thank you for having this and our Ranking Member, Senator Alexander, we are grateful you have convened this. We have a lot of hearings around here that we have clocks and time deadlines. Senators love when there is no clock. We can go, but it is a much better conversation than we often have, and we are grateful for this.

I missed a good portion of this discussion, probably about the first 40 to 45 minutes, so some of what I might ask about or what you might speak to will be redundant, and I apologize for that.

But I want to start with Ms. Fink. I just have really, maybe for Ms. Fink and Mr. Farrior; is that how you pronounce it?

Mr. FARRIOR. Yes, sir.

Senator CASEY. Thank you. This is not a very important question, but one I have to ask. You played wheelchair basketball. How did your team do?

Ms. FINK. We won two national championships my freshman and sophomore year, which was more than the able-bodied team did those years. I love my team, but we are struggling a bit.

Senator CASEY. Now, what position did you play?

Ms. FINK. Small forward.

Senator CASEY. So, did you score a lot?

Ms. FINK. Not as much as I would like.

Senator CASEY. I like you better now, because that is where I always was when I played basketball. I always wanted to score more, so we have a real kinship.

Ms. FINK. Oh, defense wins games.

Senator CASEY. Let me ask you, in your testimony, there was one point that you made about SSI. You say,

“For me, SSI played a strong role in helping me achieve my educational goals. However, for too many people, it becomes a lifelong parking lot.”

You may have addressed some of this before. I just want to get a better understanding of what you meant by that.

The CHAIRMAN. Can I just interject something? Do not forget this question. I thought maybe this was a follow on to that. This is a little bit different aspect of that.

I know some of you wanted to respond to Senator Alexander, because his question was, I think, very important. Are there things we are doing that hinder the success of colleges in terms of sup-

porting students with disabilities? Some of you have put up your name tags.

Ms. Ostrow, you put yours up, then we get to Senator Casey's question.

Senator CASEY. Sure.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Ms. OSTROW. We have lovely laws in this country to protect civil rights. Unfortunately, I think, for students, these laws have very little teeth. The Americans with Disabilities Act, HIPAA, FERPA, are often not, in reality, protected by these things, but our privacy is not necessarily protected under FERPA or HIPAA whether it is in an educational setting or in campus health services. I think, sadly, there is little we can actually do about that. Those laws address other problems, perhaps.

I think building stronger self-advocacy and advocacy networks for students and families where they can address these problems and prevent them would be even better. I know we are talking about one bill here, I think, a number of things can be done to improve a number of different bills in terms of their implementation of protecting students' civil rights.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. FARRIOR, yes. Did you have a response to Senator Alexander's point?

Mr. FARRIOR. Yes, sir.

To go along with that, I notice with different programs, the hard thing is for the comparison of in-state versus out-of-state tuition. Where we are not allowed, we are not able, excuse me, we are not able to apply for certain grants and certain funding because of what the criteria are under the Federal laws of going to post-secondary programs. So that limits students to continue to stay in school and find other opportunities.

So it is more with the financial sustainability to what goes along with what can we apply for and what can we not.

The CHAIRMAN. You had a response also, Ms. Myers.

Ms. MYERS. Yes, sir.

Senator ALEXANDER. Also, Ms. Myers, what percent of students have disabilities at your University?

Ms. MYERS. I think it is about 2 percent; 2 or 3 that are revealed to us.

We have students on the campus with disabilities that we do not know anything about because of the accessibility that we have. A lot of them might be low level, have low-level spinal cord injuries, or paraplegia, or they are working with their professors themselves. So we have another couple percent that are in that category as well.

Senator ALEXANDER. But the statistics say that 10 percent of college students are students with disabilities and only 2 percent of yours are?

Ms. MYERS. A lot of them do not want to reveal to us. Students with learning disabilities, and students with psychiatric disabilities, and veterans do not like to reveal to people. These are students who do not want to come through our door because they have dealt a lot with stigmas in high school, and they are very much afraid that they are going to be dealing with those same kinds of stigmas when they come to college. They do not understand that

a college like ours, we are very open to students with any type of disability, that we do not stigmatize our students and our faculty does not.

The CHAIRMAN. Can I interrupt? Again, you had your placard up. Senator Alexander asked a very keen question, and that is, are there things that inhibit? There are always paperwork burdens and regulations, Mr. Farrior mentioned that.

Is there something else that you had in mind that maybe hinder or put undue burdens on colleges who really want to recruit and support students with disabilities?

Ms. MYERS. Students who have Medicaid waivers who want to come from a different State have a very difficult time getting that transferred from one State to another, and their State might not support them in another State with their waiver.

Students on SSI are very concerned that if they actually take an internship, are they going to lose their SSI money? We have to make sure that the waivers are low enough that that is not a risk. That is really not fair to the students.

Students who get vocational rehabilitation support, the instant their GPA goes below a 2.0, they do not have support in college. Other students can fail, and then come back, and not be penalized for it. Yet a student with a disability runs the risk of being penalized if they are a student, first, unlike their peers. They have to do a level of work higher than other students to be able to maintain their supports, which is something that really is difficult for the student, and they are constantly worried about, "Am I going to lose my support if I do not do well in a class?"

Senator CASEY. Can I just ask? How do we best rectify that?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, you were getting onto that point with your question.

Ms. MYERS. Well, I think in the two areas with SSI for them to recognize that internships are important for students to be able to eventually gain employment and not be on SSI anymore. And they are doing a summer internship, they should not be pulling their support just because they have made a little bit above what they should, what they need to. So that needs to be something recognized by SSI.

With voc rehab, there should not be a "one strike and I am not supporting you anymore" in college. They will support them for other things, but not college. So voc rehab needs to understand these young people, 18-, 19-, 20-year-olds are young people and they struggle like other students. They have classes they do well in; they have classes they do not. And to have this one strike ruling that, "I am not going to support you in college," really needs to be changed.

The CHAIRMAN. Obviously, if you are on SSDI, the law has been so since 1959 or something, we encourage people to work who are on SSDI. It is a fallacy, a lot of people do not know; they think if you get SSDI, you should not work at all. Right now, you can earn up to \$1,070 a month. You can earn up to \$1,070 a month and still get SSDI.

Well, I can see that if you have a college student who is on SSDI, who maybe goes out and gets a summer job, makes more than

\$1,070 a month, they get cut off of that even though they are not making a lot of money for the year.

Ms. MYERS. Right.

The CHAIRMAN. They are making just a couple of months of summer work, and they get cut off of SSDI. So is that a problem? Is that what you are talking about?

Ms. MYERS. Yes, I am, and they are not on SSDI. They are on SSI usually because they have not worked before. The SSDI is for people who have actually worked previously.

The CHAIRMAN. They have worked before, that is right.

Ms. MYERS. So these are students who come in on SSI, which is for students with disabilities, people with disabilities who have never worked.

The CHAIRMAN. They never paid into the system.

Ms. MYERS. Right. They have not paid into the system. They get lower amounts of money for support in the first place, and they are at great risk for having that pulled if they make over that in 1 month. It is not something that is looked at on an annual basis; it is looked at on a monthly basis.

The CHAIRMAN. A monthly basis. See, that is a problem. I have not thought about that. It is interesting.

Did you want to re-state again?

Senator CASEY. No, I just want to make sure that Ms. Fink, the answer to the question, is that?

Ms. FINK. I am going to attempt to answer both your question and Senator Alexander's question at one time.

Senator CASEY. OK.

Ms. FINK. I think they do kind of combine together in my experience.

I think as I mentioned in my opening statement, I received a wheelchair basketball scholarship to the University of Illinois, which supplemented by some academic scholarships as well as some hard-fought voc rehab support, which I will get to in just a minute. It made my education marginally cost-free. So this was a massive financial burden lifted from my family, but of course had other costs, living expenses, very specific healthcare costs that necessitated I establish eligibility for Social Security, for SSI; I am sorry, Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid which went along with that. And that provided me with my necessary healthcare coverage throughout school, as well as somewhat of an extra income to support me beyond that point. But it also simultaneously limited my assets to \$2,000; limited my access to \$2,000 per month with SSI in order to maintain my Medicaid and my SSI there.

So our programs that are in place like Ticket to Work and PASS Plan, that are trying to alleviate some of these issues are not quite hitting the nail right yet.

The CHAIRMAN. Dana, let me ask you a question.

Ms. FINK. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. That \$2,000 that varies by State, does it not?

Ms. FINK. It does and that actually creates some of the issues. Switching, I went to school, I am originally from Georgia and then I went to school in Illinois, and had to switch beyond that point, and then I came here to do an internship in Washington, DC. That

created other issues where I could lose my healthcare coverage just for doing an internship here, and then I studied abroad, and there were different State by State regulations about where I could lose my Medicaid and lose my SSI in that respect as well. And it is so complex each State. We could have an entire hearing on what some of these issues are with SSI.

To answer Senator Alexander's question about some of the Federal Government institutional barriers, I would definitely echo what some folks have said about voc rehab. Me and my family, we really believe in early transitions. So when I was in high school, as soon as I could, I enrolled in the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services. This is a pretty good story, so I will tell it as quickly as I can, but I think everyone will enjoy this.

I was assigned a VR counselor and they asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up which, at the time, I wanted to be a journalist. And I told him that and he said that I would not be a candidate for services because of that specific career choice. He then gave an example if I wanted to be a piano teacher and I was missing an arm, then voc rehab could support me by providing me with a prosthetic arm. At which point my mother said, "Well, what if she wanted to be a tap dancer?" And he said, "Yes, then you would be a candidate for services." Which is just unbelievable, and it is not what those supports are trying to do. It is not what they should be doing. There is such a lack of knowledge. We, at the time, also did not know that I could seek recourse in these instances.

There is the Client Assistance Program which can support you if you need, if you are having issues with your voc rehab. I had to go to court and petition to get a new counselor. I got a new counselor, and then there were issues when I said I wanted to go to the University of Illinois, and they were supposed to pay for me what I would have received to go to an in-state school at the out-of-state school, and they refused to do that. Because at Georgia, there is the HOPE Scholarship which, if you have a 3.0 GPA, you largely get tuition free and so, they were supposed to provide equivalent services at Illinois, and they wanted to penalize me for that even though it was a merit-based scholarship. And then at that point, my family would have been responsible for that cost burden.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Emrey-Arras, did you have any comments on what Senator Casey asked?

Ms. EMREY-ARRAS. Yes. In terms of what we can do about this, I think, at GAO, we have reported on the lack of coordination across Federal agencies, and I think some of these issues have come up just now in terms of eligibility criteria being different and the like.

We have made a recommendation for a single, formal, Governmentwide strategy specifically focused on the transition for students with disabilities. Not only to colleges, but also to the labor force, and we have made that recommendation to the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and the Social Security Administration. And that recommendation is still open. So that has not happened as of yet, but we think it is a critical one.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Farris, I know you were going to say something, but let me just ask, and I will be done with this. I know we have others who are waiting.

As someone who was diagnosed with Asperger's, I guess you were in eighth grade at the time?

Mr. FARRIOR. Yes. Yes, sir.

Senator CASEY. So you were getting, moving closer to adulthood. And when you consider your own experience now in higher education, and you may have already answered this in light of what Senator Alexander asked, but if you had to line up one, two, three, even one or two things you hope we would do to make your experience better if you had to be doing it all over again, what would those one or two things be?

Mr. FARRIOR. The first thing to go along with what Ms. Myers said and Ms. Getzel, is to have the support system in the public school as well as private schools to bringing attention to students like, "OK. This is what you have. How can we help you?" Because when I was going through different school systems, I did not even know about Asperger's. It took me, like I said, to about age 14 just to understand what I had to transition to.

So to go along with that, I met a third grader parents whose actually said to him, "Do not tell them. Do not tell them you have Asperger's." But he gave a whole presentation about this to his classmates, and to students, and peers, and teachers to actually understand to help him better succeed. So it needs to go along once you find, once a student is actually found out that they have it, they should find ways in the school system to be able to help them succeed.

In sixth grade, I was turned down because I got diagnosed—actually in Washington, but each State is different. I was actually denied because I actually got tested in Washington, but I was supposed to be tested in South Carolina and they do not take out-of-state testing. So they should be actually reasonable to figure out what accommodations they can make from different States because not every psychiatrist is going to find the proper diagnosis for that individual.

Along with the point you are asking, how we can make a difference is just basically like I said before. Really advocate for the students along the way, going along with Senator Alexander, is that finding out what is eligible because of what Ms. Myers said. I actually talked to other students, traditional students that have lost their life scholarship that freshman year because of playing around.

I lost my scholarship when I was at Trident because I actually went down from a 3.5 to a 1.5 to where an individual asked, "How can you get a 3.5 and need all this accommodation? That does not make sense." Basically, the statement was that I was actually incompetent, so it is just actually having the assistance to succeed.

Senator CASEY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Murray, did you have something to say?

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURRAY

Senator MURRAY. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Thank you to all of our panelists. I had an opportunity to listen to some of this while I was in my office, but this is really a great discussion. I really appreciate all of your courage in coming for-

ward, especially the students that are here as well. I had one general question.

For a lot of individuals including many of our newly acquired disability veteran students, they have challenges related to documentation. And I wondered if any of the students could comment on that challenge, and what we need to be looking at.

Ms. OSTROW. For certain disability categories, I sense that it is a lot easier than for others. If you have a physical disability or a sensory disability, documentation may not even be required in some instances by certain disability services offices.

For those of us with psychiatric or learning disabilities, it is a much more complex process. I am told that I have bipolar disorder. To my knowledge, there is no test for having bipolar disorder. So what documentation should I produce to get accommodation? Even if I understand perfectly what it is, but I need it in terms of accommodations.

I think another problem is that you are required to be involved with mental health providers in order to get accommodation. You are seeking accommodations in education or work, not within the mental health system.

In addition to that, accessing those services is, in itself, a barrier. You are talking about weeks or months where you are waiting to meet with a mental health provider in order to get documentation, and then after that provided to disabled student services so that their ADA compliance office can approve it. And then from there, have them contact faculty to assemble the accommodations. I mean, we are talking several weeks into a semester where you have already missed a mid-term or several assignments before anything even happens.

Senator MURRAY. Mr. Farrior.

Mr. FARRIOR. Can you repeat the question?

Senator MURRAY. I wanted to know what your challenges or challenges that you know about in terms of documentation.

Mr. FARRIOR. Documentation for myself, for others—and it is different for each individual—has been finding out, going back to past testing to different States to where you can, what States are going to offer what testing. As well as finding out what they need.

For example, I actually needed a small class size, along with authorization to take my test outside of the classroom. And you really have to wait until you're actually accepted by the college, to my knowledge, to start the process.

Senator MURRAY. Ms. Fink, you wanted to comment?

Ms. FINK. I think this goes back to the issues of students not knowing how their rights change when they go from being covered under IDEA to then ADA in higher education.

I have had my physical disability since birth and had done quite a lot of advocacy and self-advocacy for myself and for others, and been so proud to be a person with a disability throughout this whole process. And then I got hit sophomore year of college with mental health concerns and I had no idea what to do with this. I did not have an understanding of what disability disclosure even was because I usually, I walk into a room and people know what my disability is. I do not have to disclose necessarily. That can be a challenging process for students with invisible disabilities to

know what specifically they do have to disclose in order to get accommodation.

And then it also goes back to the issue of paperwork, needed paperwork focusing more on the diagnosis rather than what the needs and the accommodations are. So, I mean, we talk about what are the strengths, and dreams, and everything that we have for ourselves. The accommodation should be, focus on what are the strengths and how do we get to those dreams rather than, "This is a person who has bipolar disorder, who has Asperger's, and these are the things that people with bipolar disorder and people with Asperger's need." It is not that one-size-fits-all approach, which is what tends to happen when we are submitting this paperwork to higher education institutions.

Senator MURRAY. Ms. Getzel, you wanted to comment.

Ms. GETZEL. Yes. Documentation issues are a very long-term issue for students with disabilities, and part of that is that transition into higher education where they are under different laws.

I think that even within a State or even within a college that could be 10 miles apart from each other, each institution has a different way of interpreting and what they require for documentation. So that makes a family and students really have to understand what that process is, what needs to be involved, and that can be very time consuming.

It is also a financial barrier for many students, especially students who come from various economic backgrounds who may not be able to—it is very expensive to get the testing necessary.

Another issue is that many students who have been coming through the secondary education system have had all kinds of tests and work around what their disability is, what accommodations, and that kind of thing. And yet, we have many institutions of higher education that will not look at or accept that type of documentation like an IEP or a summary of performance. So that is also difficult.

Why would someone who has had a long occurring disability all of a sudden need to get retesting? It is that whole adult norms and those types of issues that are brought up.

I do have to say, though, that the Association on Higher Education and Disability has really been trying to work on this a great deal, and we are seeing somewhat of a shift, not all colleges and universities, it varies widely. But some are not asking for the documentation as the first thing out the gate. They talk with the student, "What accommodations did you use? How do you learn best?" that kind of thing.

As they go on further, they then work on what accommodations are provided at the college, which brings it more to a discussion, more of students coming and saying, "This is what I need. This is how I learn best," which is so important from elementary school or preschool on up that students with disabilities really understand that.

With acquired disabilities, we have worked with students—in the middle of their situation in college, a number of times—we have worked with students in the middle of their internship, they receive a diagnosis, and now they are on the clock because they have to finish their internship or go to graduation, and that kind of

thing. And that can be very stressful for students. So there is sometimes very little leeway for students with acquired disabilities or that have not been diagnosed previously in terms of what systems they do use.

With veterans, we work with veterans with PTSD, and traumatic brain injury, and spinal cord injury. And there are so many competing responsibilities that these individuals have coming into college that even the transition to college is difficult, and coming into what they need to be doing. And then what stigma do they feel in terms of letting their unit down by acknowledging that they have a disability. There is a whole realm of issues that are very specific to veterans as well in higher education.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Myers, do you want to comment?

Ms. MYERS. You had mentioned veterans and Ms. Getzel mentioned veterans. At Wright State, we have a large group of veterans on the campus because we have a very large VA hospital in our area, and we are also adjacent to Wright Patterson Air Force Base. So a lot of veterans do come to our area.

One of the problems that they have, though, is getting their documentation from the VA. It is, and I really hate to say it this way, but it is a very convoluted system for them. We have a veteran we have been working with recently who, I have told his voc rehab counselor, I do not even need to know his diagnosis. I just want his limitations. I need to know because what he has presented to us does not give us any kind of long-term disability information.

Senator MURRAY. Because he does not have a rating from the VA?

Ms. MYERS. He has a rating from the VA. We know he has a disability and we have told them, "We are not questioning that." So that we know best how to help this student, we need to know what his actual limitations are.

Senator MURRAY. So the VA is not giving you that?

Ms. MYERS. No, they have not. And for the student to try to get this information because they have changed his doctor, so that takes time. And getting back to his counselor takes time, even by e-mailing the counselor sometimes you do not get responses back. So the VA does not make it easy at all for our veterans to be able to go to college and be successful.

This is also a hard group to reach out to because they do not want to admit they need any assistance. OK. So they finally get to that point where they are, "OK. I need some help. I really do. I have got to get some help from disability services," and then the VA is not helping them to get anything that will help us to provide their accommodations.

Now, we have gone ahead in this particular case, and we are providing him with a private room to take his test in because that is one of the big things that he really needed. That is not a big deal. We will go ahead and do that, while we wait to get everything else on him.

Senator MURRAY. Yes.

Ms. MYERS. But they do not make it easy.

The CHAIRMAN. Interesting. Ms. Ostrow.

Ms. OSTROW. In addition to being in the 22d grade, I have also had a number of jobs throughout my life, and never a single job,

have I been asked to produce any written documentation from anyone requesting an accommodation for a disability. The fact that when you go to college, or to graduate school, you have to have these packets of diagnoses and testing from a professional does not make that much sense.

The other thing that I would like to say is that for people with psychiatric disabilities, I think there is a real lack of education and awareness on the part of disabled student services in some places where students with psychiatric disabilities that are not learning disabilities, are kind of shoehorned into those kinds of accommodations because that is what the disabled student services are familiar with, and then these are very different problems that people have.

I believe it was Senator Harkin who mentioned the episodic nature of psychiatric disabilities. So like a persistent accommodation may not make that much sense. At the same time, you might need a lot more supports during certain periods of time, and those periods of time tend to be times when people are experiencing stress or life events where it may be particularly difficult to achieve those things.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Warren, did you have something you wanted to jump in on here?

STATEMENT OF SENATOR WARREN

Senator WARREN. I do. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Ranking Member.

I apologize for coming in late. I am going to have to leave. We are in the middle of a banking hearing in another room. But I want to thank you for your leadership and all that you have done to expand access for people with disabilities. Before I ended up in law school, I was a special needs teacher in public school. So that is where I started my life and this is really important.

We have made a lot of progress, because I was in this field a very long time ago, and a lot of progress has been made in terms of access. But I wanted to talk just a little bit today about materials, just wanted to focus on that part, and I am seeing people nod already on this. The changes in technology have created such incredible opportunities now to expand access, but opportunities does not always mean that is, in fact, what is happening.

In fact, there was a 2011 Federal commission that reported that colleges were adopting technologies that are not accessible and that this is creating additional problems.

So the question I wanted to start with, and I thought maybe you would be the right person for this, Ms. Myers, is why some colleges are failing to offer accessible materials even though this is what the law requires? Ms. Myers or anyone else who wants to, but I thought Ms. Myers.

Ms. MYERS. Well, I think one of the difficulties is we have colleges, and this happens at Wright State, and it puts a responsibility on our technology center to be able to take what they have adopted and get it into an accessible format.

But colleges, because of technology, are adopting more and more electronic textbooks. One of the problems with those textbooks is they are typically created in more of an image or graphical environ-

ment than a text environment. OK. That is not an accessible environment if you are using a screen reader or any kind of talking technology. So those, then, have to be turned into something that is accessible, and that is not easy to do.

The publishers are not being pushed enough to make sure that what they are creating in those electronic environments is, indeed, accessible. Even putting on the disks for the download, accessible version would make things a whole lot easier for the students. It is really hard for them when they go and they purchase that, they download it, and they cannot use it. OK. And I think that is one of the big problems.

The faculty members are also not being pushed to check out accessibility before they adopt to make sure that what they are adopting is, indeed, accessible particularly if they are using something electronic, or if they are using some kind of software program within their teaching as well, to make sure that that is going to be accessible. But I think there is a two-way street here: faculty making sure that what they are adopting is accessible, but publishers making sure that what they are putting out there is accessible.

The burden of responsibility falls onto—has in the past and continues, in our opinion—to fall on the university to make sure that the students have the materials that they need to be able to be successful in college. So that responsibility falls on us to make sure that what we are giving them is accessible. But the publishers are not helping and sometimes the faculty are not either.

Senator WARREN. Good. And I thought maybe I could ask, what are the universities and the schools doing to push. But Ms. Getzel, could you add to this please?

Ms. GETZEL. Yes. It is a very big difficulty, especially with publishers. I know that in work that we have been doing in working with the disability support service office, working with students, that it is either very long to get it or they tell us it is not available, and it is very difficult.

What we would like to see more on sort of the publisher end now with the technology, it is almost like all this technology is happening, but in one sector, we cannot seem to get that opened up. And I know that there are certain regulations or policies and that kind of thing, especially with publishers.

I know that in Virginia, at one point, they started almost like a lending library among the universities who had accessible materials that they could then use, if you belonged to this consortium, then you would have access to some of that to relieve some of the costs, as well as some of the waiting time. And again, faculty do need to be very aware of this, and sometimes books or what coursework is put up in a short amount of time, which then the disability support services offices are scrambling to try to get that.

I know that the universities, at least at VCU, is really trying to adhere very carefully to that and always we get things at the beginning or the end of the semester to alert faculty to be aware of these type of things. But it really is a difficulty.

Senator WARREN. Yes. Ms. Myers.

Ms. MYERS. We did some of the lending in Ohio. We established within our consortium, we are members of the Southwest Ohio Consortium on Higher Education and we created a lending library.

One of the problems that we had is a problem we have within our own University, which is, we can have two economics professors who do not adopt the same books. And when you have that issue within your own university, having other schools adopting the same thing, when there are no standards created by the State saying, "All history teachers have to use this." Or, you know, "Within a university, all economics professors have to do this. All sociology professors have to do this," which takes away their academic freedom. That is another part of the problem.

We do get calls from other schools asking them, well, if we have done a book to help them out, which we will share. We have done this for quite a while. The only problem is most of the time, it is not something that we have because of that freedom that the faculty has.

We do use a clearinghouse called AccessText and we can get about 60 percent of our materials from them. They do not include the small publishers in that process. It is typically the large publishers, but there are also files that we cannot just hand over to a student. We have to take them. A lot of times, it is one file for the whole book, which means we have to break it up into portions that the students can use. And sometimes page numbers are missing or there is all this missing information so we still have to work on the file before we can hand it over.

Senator WARREN. I very much appreciate your comments on this and they are very valuable. I think that accessible materials are critical. We already have laws about requirements, and clearly they are not being met.

Today, Senator Hatch and I are introducing legislation to establish guidelines to ask an independent agency to develop guidelines so that we will have some guidelines for what kinds of accessible materials we need. We are hopeful that what this means is that colleges will be able to meet their legal requirements if guidelines are out there. And that we will be able to develop a market for these materials so that the publishers, as you rightly say, Ms. Myers, receive some encouragement to make sure that they have consistently available materials and that we will be able to do more. It is not enough to say to our students, "We are trying to make college accessible, but when you get here, you are not going to be able to deal with the material."

I just want to say this bill has strong support from the disability community and on behalf of Senator Hatch, I wanted to come here today to hear from you about it, and be able to mention it. And again, I apologize. I am in a banking hearing and I am going to have to go back to that. But thank you for the work you are all doing and thank you for all you have done.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Warren.

I was just informed by my counsel that, and I met this group before, Bookshare has a Department of Education grant to provide textbooks in different formats. But I was just informed that one of the largest publishers of textbooks, Pearson, does not allow that. I

do not know why. We will have to look into that. It has to do with the copyright, I guess, and things like that, but some publishers do, do that. So it is sort of a little mixture of this and a little mixture of that.

I think that is maybe something we ought to look at too in terms of our reauthorization of our Higher Education because we put the money into TPSID. They are doing well, but if young people like Mr. Farrior and who else was involved with TPSID—

Ms. GETZEL. I am.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, Ms. Getzel. But if you cannot get the textbooks in a format that is accessible then that limits what we are doing in that program, in the TPSID program. So I think we are going to have to look at this textbook thing.

We are running out of time, but Ms. Fink, we will close this down, but Ms. Fink, you had one last thing.

Ms. FINK. I just wanted to caution that accessible materials are not limited to accessible textbooks.

The CHAIRMAN. Say that again?

Ms. FINK. I just wanted to caution that accessible materials are not to be limited to accessible textbooks. When I was in school 4 years ago, half of my reading was done through Noodle or through a system like that where a teacher would upload a couple of PDF's, and then you have to read it by the next day, and that is not enough time if that format is not accessible, and there needs to be some sort of regulations about those materials going onto those on-line platforms as well.

The CHAIRMAN. Good point, good point.

This has been a great discussion; just a nice, open format of discussion. I think we have covered a lot of the points.

Again, I would just let you know that there are a lot of barriers facing students with disabilities in getting a higher education; it runs the gamut with all the things that we have talked about here this morning. I am not saying that we can solve all that in the Higher Education bill, and probably not, but there are certain things that we are going to have to look at and address, and I think you have given us some thoughts this morning on what we can do to help try to remove some of those barriers.

I would just ask, as we proceed, that you keep in contact with this committee and with our staff, and give us the benefit of your thoughts as we move forward on the reauthorization. I would sure appreciate it.

I think there are a lot of things that we can do to make sure that we have equal access, good transitions, effective recruitment, making sure that kids who are in IDEA who have an IEP know what they have and how colleges are able to take that and move that into the college setting, support services, and overcoming a kind of an attitudinal barrier that exists in a lot of schools.

Let us face it, when you talk about higher education being accessible for kids with disabilities, the first thing that pops into their minds is, "Oh, well, we must have ramps and widen doors." It is physical. They think about the physical disability, but as you point out, Ms. Fink, sometimes people have more than just a physical disability, they have other disabilities too, right, Ms. Ostrow? They

have intellectual, psychiatric disabilities that need to be accommodated also.

So they need to start thinking along those lines. Obviously, Wright State has done that in many ways, maybe the University of Illinois too, but I do not think that this is very widespread. In other words, thinking about accommodations and accessibility for nonphysical disabilities that students have. So I think we kind of have to focus on that too.

I look forward to working with members of this committee to craft the policies that will aid youth to access higher education. If there are certain paperwork things that are in place that are keeping colleges from offering supports, we ought to look at that too.

SSI, as I said to Senator Alexander that is sort of not in our bailiwick; that is the finance committee. But maybe we could work with them to provide some kind of crossing State borders when you are a bona fide student and you are going from one school to another that some kind of solution for a student during their college years when they are working on a summer job or something like that where they might go over the monthly limit. They need that money for going to school. Also, we need to address the SSI limits of only \$2,000 in assets, if I am not mistaken, something like that. If you earn a little bit more than that and you have that in the bank, you are cut off from benefits. They will cut you off your Medicaid on SSI. But like I said, that is not in our jurisdiction, but something maybe we could work with the finance committee on.

I thank you all. Some of you came a great distance. I appreciate it. Thank you. You have given us great insights. Thank you for your leadership in this area.

We will leave the record open for 10 days to allow additional statements or supplements to be submitted for the record.

And the hearing will be adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:53 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]