

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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DOLE LEGISLATION TO STRENGTHEN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DISABLED PASSES CONGRESS

Washington, DC -- Legislation that removes disincentives in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program for disabled recipients who work passed Congress just before adjournment and is on its way to the president for signing, according to the bill's chief sponsor Senator Bob Dole (R-KS).

Dole said the legislation - "The Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act" - "was a perfect way to wrap up an unusually productive year on Capitol Hill. Disability Leadership says that this is the most significant legislation impacting on the economic status of persons with disabilities since the establishment of SSI.

"I have always maintained that persons with disabilities want to work and be productive members of society," said Sen. Dole. "My legislation provides that disabled Americans will not have their SSI payments yanked away simply because they are pursuing the goal of maintaining an independent living."

The legislation (H.R. 5595), also sponsored by Rep. Steve Bartlett (R-TX), will allow SSI recipients to continue receiving cash payments up to the income "breakeven point", which currently amounts to \$757 monthly plus whatever state supplementary payments may be paid. In addition, Medicaid coverage would be extended if a recipient would be otherwise eligible for SSI except for his earnings, according to Sen. Dole.

"This legislation does not remove all the obstacles for persons with disabilities in the workplace. A lack of adequate public transportation, appropriate training and the ignorance of some employers still stand in the way of many prospective handicapped applicants.

"However, by making the Section 1619 program permanent, and by initiating several improvements, more individuals will be able to enter the workplace and compete without jeopardizing their economic or medical security," Dole said.

The Dole bill is estimated to save the federal government up to \$4,000 each year for every disabled person who works. More than 8,500 of the nation's 2.6 million disabled SSI recipients now participate in the temporary version of the Section 1619 program.

The legislation also includes two general SSI amendments included by the House that ensure the payment of benefits on behalf of deceased recipients and the relaxation of requirements regarding treatment of couples in medical institutions.