

THE NEW ERA OF EXECUTIVE ACTION

PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

May 5, 2015

Background

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the workplace, as long as it does not cause undue hardship for the employer. However, a decade later, due to evidence that qualified persons with disabilities were still being refused employment, President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 13163, calling for an additional one hundred thousand individuals with disabilities to be employed by the federal government over the following five years.

Unfortunately, few steps were taken to implement that order, and in 2010, individuals with disabilities represent less than 5 percent of the 2.5 million people in the federal workforce, even though they represent 19 percent of the overall population. Nationwide, the unemployment rate of people with disabilities in 2010 was 14.8 percent, while the unemployment rate overall was 9.4 percent.

Action

On July 26, 2010, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13548: Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities.

What It Does

Executive Order 13548 calls for the achievement of the same hiring goals set by President Clinton's Executive Order 13163, which sought over a five-year period 100,000 new hires of individuals with disabilities and targeted disabilities to work in the federal government. To achieve this goal, the order requires the following actions regarding recruitment and hiring:

- The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will design model recruitment and hiring strategies for agencies for individuals with disabilities.

This brief is part of The Century Foundation initiative, The New Era of Executive Action, which is available online at <https://tcfdotorg.atavist.com/executive-action>.

- Each federal agency will develop an agency-specific plan for promoting employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Each federal agency will designate a senior-level official as the point person to be accountable for developing and implementing their agency's plan.
- Each federal agency will increase participation of individuals with disabilities in internships, fellowships, and training and mentoring programs.
- The OPM will implement a system for reporting regularly to the president, heads of agencies, and the public on their progress in completing the objectives of this order.

The order also requires the following actions related to increasing retention and return to work:

- The OPM will identify and assist federal agencies in implementing the best strategies for retaining workers with disabilities as well as expanding return-to-work outcomes for those who are injured on the job.
- Federal agencies will make special efforts to ensure the retention of those who are injured on the job.

Status

The order is currently in its last year of rollout.

Impact

The OPM's most recent annual report has shown some progress. Since fiscal year 2011—the first year for which the order was in effect—the federal government has hired 51,352 full-time permanent employees with disabilities, making the current total 234,395 people. More than 18 percent of new hires in fiscal year 2013 were individuals with disabilities, the highest rate since 1981. However, a report by GAO in 2012 stated that the federal government was not on track to fulfill the requirements of the order, and made multiple recommendations to expedite the process, such as more comprehensive briefings for the president, especially regarding deficiencies in federal agency plans.

Nationwide, the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities was 13.3 percent in 2013, almost double the rate for those with no disability (7.1 percent). Additionally, 34 percent of workers with a disability were employed part time, compared to 19 percent of those with no disability.

Response

- Elaine E. Katz, senior vice president of grants and communications for the Kessler Foundation, praised the order, stating that it was “the most comprehensive effort by the federal government to stimulate employment for people with disabilities.” However, she notes that there is still much to be done to fully integrate individuals with disabilities into the workplace.