

DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION RESEARCH COALITION

1501 M STREET, N.W. SUITE 700 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005

July 25, 2019

The Honorable Alex M. Azar, II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Implementation of the Government-Wide Strategic Plan on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research

Dear Secretary Azar:

People experiencing significant disabilities, resulting from illness, trauma, developmental disability, war-related injury, or the effects of chronic illness, depend on state-of-the-art, cross-cutting research and knowledge translation to lead proud, productive lives in the American mainstream. To maximize our Nation's return on investment, Congress in 2014 mandated the design and implementation of a Government-Wide Strategic Plan for Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (the Plan).¹ Congress directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in his or her capacity as chair of the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR), to fulfill this mandate.² The Plan was released by ICDR in March of this year.³

On behalf of the 24 member organizations of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC), we express our gratitude for releasing the Plan. At the same time, we are deeply concerned that the objectives and outcomes set out in the Plan may not be realized without your personal leadership. The purpose of this letter is to request a meeting with you to discuss the government-wide efforts to implement the Plan and how the DRRC can help you and your team to translate the promises of the Plan into realities for the approximately 54 million Americans living with disabilities today.

DRRC recently met with Jim Whitehead, the former director of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), and Mary Lazare, the Principal Deputy Administrator of the Administration for Community Living. We were encouraged by their commitment, experience, and vision for the future of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research. As you know, Jim had also been designated to serve as the

¹ Section 434(5) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which added Section 203(c) to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended [29 U.S.C. 763(c)].

² Section 434(1)(A)(ii) of WIOA, which amended Section 203(a)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended [29 U.S.C. 763(a)(1)]

³ [The Government-Wide Strategic Plan on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research.](#)

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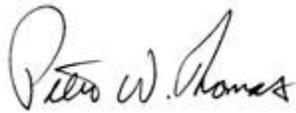
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chair of the ICDR in your stead. We believe that the next NIDILRR director, if selected as your

designee to chair the ICDR, will be able to successfully administer the Plan *if, and only if*, other program operating components within HHS (such as NIH, CDC, AHRQ, and ASPE) and other departments of the federal government (such as the VA) understand that he or she is unequivocally acting on your behalf as ICDR Chair, not in their capacity as director of NIDILRR. It is certainly understandable that the director of NIH, for example, is more likely to make critically necessary commitments of resources and high-level staff to the implementation of the Plan if it is clear that he is accountable to the Secretary for making and carrying out specified responsibilities under the Plan, rather than being accountable to the Director of an agency that has a budget 1/390 its size.

Thank you for considering our request to meet in person to discuss the implementation of the Government-Wide Strategic Plan on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research and how the federal government can maximize its return on investment in this crucial area of research. If the DRRC can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the DRRC coordinators, Peter Thomas and Bobby Silverstein, at 202-466-6550 or by email at Peter.Thomas@PowersLaw.com and Bobby.Silverstein@PowersLaw.com.

Sincerely,



Peter Thomas



Robert Silverstein

cc: Mary Lazare
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