



## Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress

TO: Members of the House Committee on Education and Labor  
FROM: John Anton  
RE: **H.R. 2373 – Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act**  
DATE: July 21, 2021

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. Growing up, I felt segregated and devalued, and hard to use my voice. I felt invisible, not respected or listened to when I spoke.

My parents did their best to have me included. It helped being involved in Special Olympics, Boy Scouts, hunting and fishing with my dad.

After high school, I did a variety of food service jobs which were not good for my diet, I can tell you that!

Then, I attended a local workshop where they had us doing jobs such as packaging, shipping and piece work. It was very boring. My friends would sit around playing cards, watching videos and tv, and just hanging out with nothing to work on. In addition, we got paid very little for the work we did. It was very discouraging and did not encourage us to do our best. Many of my friends felt the same way.

One friend worked all week for only \$1.25 and she was told she couldn't make any more money. Another was paid \$10 a week for cleaning bathrooms. I went to my supervisor and said that I was not satisfied and wanted to do more. He told me they didn't have anything else, and I quit!!

I connected with the local Arc, learning how to dress professionally. I wanted to have a job where I could be wearing a suit and tie and carry a briefcase, like my dad, who was a teacher.

The Arc sparked my interest in advocacy to make things happen. I led the Mass Advocates Standing Strong regionally and went on to be a Chairperson of the state-wide organization.

It is all about respect and dignity as a citizen for me and not being stigmatized by labels-which belong on jars, not people!!

I was hired by the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress to be their legislative specialist. I get paid above minimum wage and I advocate for legislation that supports and protects the rights of all people with Down syndrome.

For many years I have also worked as a legislative intern at the State House in Boston on bills affecting all of us.

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20 Burlington Mall Road, Suite 261  
Burlington, MA 01803  
Tel. 781-221-0024 ext. 301  
[www.mdsc.org](http://www.mdsc.org)



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Along with many other self-advocates, I come to Washington DC for the National Down Syndrome Society Hill Day. We advocate for policies to ensure all people with Down syndrome have access to meaningful jobs, healthcare and other important resources.

The NDSS connected me with a 5-week internship with Congresswoman Cathy McMorris-Rodgers from Washington State, who has a son with Down syndrome and is the co-lead on HR 2373. I'm proud to be here today to represent both of these organizations – the MDSC and the NDSS.

For many years people told me I couldn't do what I wanted, but I persisted. My parents were very surprised at how high my goals were. Look at me now!!

The fact is that people with disabilities need REAL JOBS WITH REAL PAY, LIKE ALL OF YOU!!!

I urge the Members of this Committee to support the phase out of Section 14c and the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act HR 2373.