

REMARKS

OF

THE HONORABLE KAROL V. MASON
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS
NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH PROGRAM

ON

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2013
WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Laura [Colon-Marréro], and welcome all of you to this OJP celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month. I especially want to welcome our guest speaker, Day Al-Mohamed. We're very pleased to have her with us.

Before I introduce Day, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who had a hand in organizing today's program, starting with Michelle Arbeit, OJP's Disability Employment Program Manager, and the Disability Committee members.

I also want to thank Laura and Todd Garrison from our Equal Employment Opportunity Office. This is Laura's first special observance since she was named Director of EEO – a very well-deserved promotion. She and Todd work so hard throughout the year to make sure OJP is a fair and diverse place to work and we really appreciate all that they do.

Thanks, as well, to the Honor Guard from the Department of Homeland Security's Special Protective Service, to Rhea for lending us her angelic voice, and to Robert Balzer for signing the lyrics to the National Anthem.

Finally, I want to thank Phil Merkle, Jennifer McCarthy, Angela Noel Gantt, and their wonderful staff in the Office of Administration for all they do to support OJP's employees and for the excellent work they're doing to recruit, hire, and accommodate those with disabilities.

There are more than 50 million people living with disabilities in our country today. That accounts for about one-sixth of the total U.S. population. They make up a vibrant share of the American workforce, and in many cases are leaders in their fields.

Unfortunately, they have an employment rate far lower than that of Americans without disabilities. Only 20 percent of Americans with disabilities are in the labor force. And they are underrepresented in the federal workforce, as well. In fact, only about seven percent of civilian federal employees are persons with disabilities. There's no question that, collectively, we need to do a better job of recruiting and hiring – in all sectors.

The good news is that, at least here at the federal level, we're improving. The President issued an Executive Order three years ago calling for increased hiring of employees with disabilities. As a result, according to a report analyzing Equal Employment Opportunity Commission data, the executive branch hired 18,000 workers with disabilities in fiscal year 2011 – that's up 9 percent from the previous year. Today, the federal government is hiring people with disabilities at a higher rate than at any point in three decades. That's encouraging.

And I'm pleased that, here at OJP, we're exceeding all benchmarked categories. Persons with disabilities represent nine percent of our employees. Now, that's lower than where we need to be, but it's worth remarking that OJP's levels exceed both federal and overall civilian workforce levels.

But we need to double down. People with disabilities are critical to our mission here at OJP, and we simply will not meet our potential until we fully tap into this pool of talent.

Our Human Resources and EEO offices are working hard to help us find and recruit people with disabilities. Under OJP's FedRecruit Disability Hiring Initiative, we've worked with the Partnership for Public Service to develop a strategy for recruiting and hiring interns with disabilities and for training hiring managers.

Through the FedRecruit Fellows program, we're providing hands-on training for hiring managers, including training on the use of accommodation technology. The training also addresses misconceptions around interacting with and hiring people with disabilities.

We have "Employer in Residence" relationships with some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the area, including Gallaudet, Georgetown, and George Washington University. We're even partnering with the City of Alexandria. We're also applying what we've learned to the Schedule A hiring process, and we're working with our Disability Awareness and Veterans Inclusion Coordinators across the federal sector and with the Wounded Warriors program.

Thanks to these efforts, we're being looked to as a model, not only in other parts of the Department, but across the federal government. We're making good progress, and we're building on it. In fact, our FY14 FedRecruit Strategy Meeting is next week. I'm proud of the work our Human Resources Office has done to make this happen.

In addition to what we're doing internally, we're addressing the challenges faced by people with disabilities who come into contact with the justice system. Our Office for Victims of Crime, led by Joye Frost, has been working hard over the years to make sure victims with disabilities are getting the services they need.

OVC's *Vision 21* Initiative, which provides the framework for victim services in the 21st century, calls attention to the challenges faced by victims with disabilities, but also points to progress in the field. For example, there's a program called the Building Partnerships for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities Initiative in Massachusetts that links a broad range of state agencies to serve crime victims with disabilities.

Programs like this are a huge step forward, especially for a population that, historically, has been effectively shut out of many services. Along those lines, the National Institute of Justice is working with the Vera Institute of Justice on a study to examine the criminal justice experiences of sexual assault survivors with disabilities. This will help broaden our base of knowledge about people with disabilities who come into contact with the system.

So we're working both inside and outside the agency to improve outreach to people with disabilities. We've got a great team of committed people working to enhance OJP's diversity, and an equally talented group working to improve the fairness and accessibility of our justice system.

We will build on this progress, and we will continue to educate, engage, and empower current and future employees in pursuit of an inclusive workforce, both because it's the right thing to do and because it's the best thing for all of us.

Now I have the pleasure of introducing our keynote speaker.

Day Al-Mohamed comes to us from the Department of Labor, where she's a senior policy advisor in the Office of Disability Employment Policy.

Before joining Labor in 2009, she was a Senior Legislative and Federal Affairs Officer with the American Psychological Association, and she served on the board of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities. She also continues to serve on the Board of Directors of the American Association of People with Disabilities.

She's done a lot of legislative advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged groups during her career, and she focuses much of her energy these days on helping young people with disabilities enter the workforce.

I'm delighted she could join us today. Please welcome Day Al-Mohamed.

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