

Ticket Talk



Podcast Transcript

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Ticket Talk: What You Should Know About Section 503

Opening: You are listening to the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work podcast series. Get answers to your questions, access information and resources, and receive expert advice on work incentives and the Ticket to Work program.

Interviewer: The new Section 503 rules are helping create opportunities for people with disabilities to find jobs. Are you wondering how else these changes will affect you? In this episode of Ticket Talk we've done the research for you! Here are a couple of facts about the new Section 503 regulations that every Social Security disability beneficiary who is exploring their work options should know.

You may be asking, what is Section 503? Section 503 is part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This Act has supported people with disabilities for more than 40 years by offering services, promoting awareness, and providing fair opportunities specifically for people with disabilities. Section 503 prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating against people with disabilities, and also requires employers to take affirmative action in recruiting, hiring, training, promoting and retaining people with disabilities.

Did you know that today, even though technological advances have made it increasingly possible for people with disabilities to perform in the workplace, the number of people without disabilities who are working is still higher than those who identify as having a disability? The Federal agency that issued the new regulation, the Department of Labor's *Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs* or O-F-C-C-P, estimates that the new Section 503 requirements could result in an additional 600,000 workers with disabilities being hired by Federal contractors.

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What will these changes to the Section 503 regulations mean to you? Here's what you need to know:

First, Section 503 gives you the opportunity to voluntarily self-identify as a person with a disability before being offered a job. When you have a disability it can be difficult to decide to let others know, especially if you are concerned that disclosing the information may affect your job. Under the revised Section 503 regulations, you may be open with your employer about your disability without worrying about future discrimination or other employment issues. The employer must keep this information confidential. This portion of the rule also requires employers to invite current employees to self-identify, every five years, as an individual with a disability. If and when employees take the opportunity to complete a self-identification form, they are showing employers that people with disabilities are capable workers and helping to reduce the stigma and widen acceptance of all people with disabilities.

Second, something that has raised much confusion is that the new rule establishes a seven percent utilization goal for Federal contractors in the hiring and retention of workers with disabilities. This does not mean that an employer must meet a minimum percentage, or quota, nor a ceiling for employing people with disabilities. An employer who doesn't meet the seven percent goal will not be in violation of the regulation, but they do have to report information that shows the number of people with disabilities that apply for jobs versus the number of people with disabilities who are hired. This requirement helps contractors measure how well they are doing in recruiting and hiring people with disabilities. If they find that they are not meeting their goal, then they must develop a plan to address any issues preventing their success.

Finally, you may be wondering how and where you can find jobs that result from these new regulations. As employers begin working on ways to implement these new rules, the best place to get information is from providers that are already offering employment services to people with disabilities, including American Job Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and Ticket to Work Employment Networks. Employers will work with these groups to find candidates for open positions.

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To get more information about Section 503, visit the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs website at www.dol.gov to learn more.

For information about Social Security's Ticket to Work program and employment for people with disabilities, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work, or call the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 for voice, or 1-866-833-2967 for TTY.

Learn more about Ticket to Work and visit socialsecurity.gov/work, call **1-866-968-7842 (V)** or **1-866-833-2967 (TTY)** or email us at support@chooseworkttw.net today!