



Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

SSI Work Incentives

Accessing employment supports for youth with disabilities transitioning from school to work

presented by

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Ellie Emanuel: Welcome to the NTA audio teleconference on *SSI Work Incentives: Accessing employment supports for youth with disabilities transitioning from school to work*.

Since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which you all know as the Welfare Reform Act that redefined childhood eligibility for SSI benefits, the Social Security Administration has increased its efforts to outreach to families, children, and students to explain and promote SSI benefits and work incentives. These efforts have occurred both at the federal and local levels.

We have also seen growth of advocacy efforts, proposed legislation, and demonstration projects at the national and local levels modify the Social Security Work Incentives Program in, for example, the Jeffers-Kennedy Bill, known as the Medicaid Buy-in Bill, and the most recent SSA model demonstration projects. All of these efforts in the area of SSI work incentives can result in increased support for students who are transitioning from school to work.

The purpose of this audio teleconference is to present basic information about the SSI Work Incentives grant that we are engaged in, and about

the Disability Determination Service process, which is an important part of accessing SSI benefits and the work incentives.

Our first guest speaker, Bill Halloran, Project Officer for the SSI Work Incentives in Transitioning Youth with Disabilities, is with the Office of Special Education Programs, US Department of Education. Bill who has had a long history of commitment to improving the quality of lives of children and young adults with severe disabilities, continues to maintain a strong working relationship with Federal Social Security Administration, focused on the goal of establishing continued systems improvement, which will benefit transitioning youth with disabilities.

Bill will begin the conference today by discussing the current SSI Work Incentives Project, describe what he views as some challenges in accessing the SSI work incentives, and suggest some possible directions for addressing these challenges.

Bill Halloran: There is such a variety of people on this call in terms of their knowledge of the SSI program, that I want to give a brief overview of the program, the things that we are interested in, and how it relates to transitioning youth.

One of the interesting things is that we still have many people who don't realize that public

education is the only program that has a zero reject mandate. In other words, an individual's entitlement to services ends when students leave school. However, there are some programs that certain individuals are entitled to. But differing from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the SSI program is only for individuals with certain disabilities. The SSI is a federal program for people who have severe physical or mental disabilities which would impede their ability to work.

The SSI program oftentimes is also the key or the ticket in most states for eligibility into the Medicaid program. So, in addition to being the cash benefits program, the SSI program is also very much linked with an individual's application to Medicaid. I mention the Medicaid because this may be in some senses one of the most important aspects of the program.

First of all, let me go back, and I am going to be speaking primarily now to individuals at the transitioning age. There is childhood eligibility for SSI and there is adult eligibility for SSI. At age eighteen, the adult eligibility kicks in for individuals who have disabilities. This is an important juncture because prior to age eighteen, an individual, in addition to having to have a disability that would meet the medical listings to be eligible for the SSI program, would also have to meet certain income eligibility requirements tied to their family's income. At age eighteen, the income is just tied to the individual. So, the individual at age eighteen is a family of one themselves, regardless of the income of family. Their eligibility is based on their own income and resources.

Particularly in the areas of individuals with cognitive impairments, probably the broadest support for community-based services for adults

with cognitive disabilities throughout the country is the Medicaid program. Very often families are shocked to learn that when a student ages out or turns twenty-one, there is no automatic program that they would be going into.

Students I'm talking about are individuals with more severe disabilities whose prognosis for living or working independently at the time they leave school would be very low. What kinds of programs and services might be available to these individuals at the time they leave school? Primarily for those with cognitive disabilities, they would be programs and services supported through the state's Medicaid waiver program. The Medicaid waiver is a waiver received for providing community-based services. As we have looked at the influence of the Medicaid program, we have seen its tremendous growth as it relates to being the primary source of support for programs and services for youth or individuals with more severe disabilities who are at the post-school level.

So, that clearly is one of the areas we are trying to encourage people to learn about, so that they can provide guidance to families of individuals with more severe disabilities who will be exiting the school system and seeking out community-based programs and services for their disabled children, or for adult disabled individuals.

Now, getting back to some of the issues related to the SSI program, probably one of the biggest concerns of ours is that research has shown that nearly half of the people who would be considered to be probably eligible for the SSI program – this is both national research and research that's done at various states – has indicated that at least half as many people who are on the SSI program – and we're talking school-aged individuals eighteen and

over – nearly half of the people who we feel confident would be eligible for the program have not been – are not a part of the SSI program. The primary reason is that many families know nothing about the SSI program. Other reasons might be that families had been initially turned down when they looked into the program because of their income. But, of course, at age eighteen the family income is not a factor for the individual.

Our biggest concern is that this is a program that's a very, very important aspect of adult living for individuals who would qualify. However, very little is shared in terms of what the SSI program is, how schools might assist in identifying individuals who might meet the eligibility requirements, and what could be done to assist families and help them get connected with this program. So, clearly, one of our big concerns is that from an education perspective little is being done on a formal basis to assist individuals and families connect with the SSI program.

A second thing that we are concerned about is that most times when a school-aged individual is applying to the SSI program, certain information is being requested of the public schools to assist State Disability Determination units in making their decision relating to eligibility. We have been reviewing the process and the questionnaires and information being sought from schools.

Not only are schools doing very little to direct people to and explain the program, but there is little training on the part of school personnel in terms of their role in assisting the determination agency in gathering information so that the eligibility could be established. I think that a later part of this conversation will be with Disability Determination Services personnel from the State of Minne-

sota. So, what I'd like to do is to take some time to answer questions related to this.

But once again, I just want to reinforce the fact that the SSI program is an important program for certain individuals with more severe disabilities. Our concern, number one, is that the schools do not play an active role in assisting people and guiding people towards that program. Number two, that schools are probably not prepared to the extent we would like them to be for their roles in participating in the determination process.

And probably the most important thing, the third thing I haven't mentioned yet, is that we believe that the work incentives, which are part of the SSI program, can be a significant benefit for students who are just adjusting to entering into work, who are transitioning from school to work. We feel that the SSI work incentives can provide a significant assistance and support to individuals transitioning from school to employment.

Again, I'm concerned that I'm probably far over the heads of some people who may not know anything about this program. And I'm talking so basic in terms of people who are familiar with the SSI program.

I do want to let you know that the University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration has put together a marvelous handbook on Supplemental Security Income Work Incentives and Transition Students. This is a must have – in terms of a background reference – to people who could be or should be assisting individuals become more familiar with the program.

Editor's Note: The SSI Handbook can be downloaded off the National Transition Network Web site at <http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ntn> or you may order a hard copy through Peter Aleshire at (612) 627-4008.

We have four grantees who together comprise our "Work Incentives Transition Network." These grantees are:

- The Rehabilitation and Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University
- The Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota
- The Institute for Community Inclusion at Boston Children's Hospital in Massachusetts
- The Institute on Rural Disabilities in Montana.

All four of these projects are working collectively as part of that network to provide technical assistance to the schools as to how the SSI program could be assisting in the transition of youth with disabilities.

Ellie, I would just as soon stop here and entertain any questions people might have.

Angela Rojas-Edenbach (Michigan): have a question. I'm Angela Rojas-Edenbach (phonetic). I work with Michigan Rehab Services. And I wonder if, Mr. Halloran, you are aware of the Social Security Initiatives going on right now at the federal level. They have a work group that is developing plans on how the Social Security Administration is going to work with communities to promote and develop work incentives and make them more acceptable to disabled individuals. We happen to have one of our two area directors from Social Security here in Michigan as part of a work group. And he has asked for our input on some of the things that we feel would be important. I wonder if you may have that connection. If not, I could provide it for you.

Bill Halloran: I think we've had the connection to some extent here at the national level. I first want to clarify what work incentives are, for people who have no knowledge of what I'm talking about. Work incentives are incentives built into the pro-

gram that are intended to enable people to secure employment, or in addition to securing employment to improve their employability and their earnings levels. An example of a couple of the work incentives we are most concerned about are the PASS - Plan for Achieving Self Support - and the IRWE - Impairment Related Work Expenses. There are also student earned income exclusions and other types of work incentives.

To answer your question, just last week we completed the review of a document we did for the Social Security Administration, which gives examples of the utilization of work incentives for transitioning youth. These case studies have all been cleared by the Social Security Administration. And I think we're in the process now of publishing these in an effort that people could look at the work incentives as applied to the transitioning youth to get ideas on how others might use them.

But the work going on in Michigan and elsewhere is where we would really be encouraging. For example, if you as a rehab agency person are involved in a task force working on this, if you do not have school personnel as part of that group, I would very much encourage you to include them or seek their inclusion into your efforts. But we know of the work going on in a number of different areas. But our hope is that as part of that the education personnel are considered part of the process. Would that be true in your state?

Angela Rojas-Edenbach (Michigan): In fact, this whole year we have been holding training sessions for counselors and partners that are working with them in transition also, a PASS writing workshop. I can't tell you how many of them have actually been school personnel, but I can tell you that at least we have completed work incentive

training. Tomorrow we have our last session on PASS writing workshop, and then we are going to go on to IRWE. We have a cadre of two presenters doing this across the state for Michigan Rehab Services in particular.

Bill Halloran: Well, I'll tell you, I really would hope that that would be expanded to the education personnel. One of the saddest things is that when we work with special education personnel we find that the knowledge level as it relates to the SSI program, as well as, of course, the work incentives, is so low that it's like a foreign thing to them.

So, all of those things happening, one of the things that we do know is that there have been few PASSs that have been approved for transitioning youth. And we're monitoring with the Social Security office, the central office in Baltimore, working with them to try to identify specific examples of PASSs that have been approved as population –

Angela Rojas-Edenbach (Michigan): Could you possibly provide those to us? At least for training purposes?

Bill Halloran: The case studies that I'm talking about will be available fairly soon.

Dan Williams (California): This is Dan Williams. There's a big problem in California because most people do not want the students to work because they are afraid they are going to be disqualified for Social Security benefits. What have you done to help alleviate that?

Bill Halloran: It's something that we're seeing everywhere. The schools – more and more across the country – community-based vocational training, supported employment activities are starting for youth with disabilities prior to leaving school. So, we're seeing everywhere now, which I'm so

thankful of, that the emergence of programs which include community-based employment as part of the transition plans for students. So, we often hear that when the school broaches with the family the notion that they would like to involve their youth – and it's usually youth over eighteen, but regardless – the youth is on the SSI program and receiving cash benefits from the SSI program.

When the schools oftentimes bring up the notion of becoming involved in community-based employment for pay prior to leaving school or just being involved in employment, oftentimes families become very concerned that if a program in the school was where the student was involved in paid employment, if that program were to be implemented for their children their concern would be any income earned would disqualify them from continued participation in the SSI program. This is not necessarily so whatsoever, particularly – in fact, it's pretty impossible for me to think of any individual involved in a, you know, community-based employment or work study kind of program while they are in school to be earning at a level that would anywhere near come to the point of disqualifying the individual for continued eligibility.

That may sound nice, but I can assure you that we've worked directly with a number of parents who are so concerned that any kind of earnings on the part of their children would disqualify them from continued eligibility. It's not the case whatsoever and, in fact, the Social Security Administration has tried in the past to deliver this message through its red book. It's tried to deliver this message through a program called "Graduating to Independence." And we're currently working on things to assist school personnel so that they could show a parent the money being earned and how it would

or would not affect anything dealing with their benefits.

So, I guess in the broadest sense, those of you who know nothing about this or little about this program, there are many families who would believe that any income earned would disqualify their child or their family member from this program. Not true at all.

And this is one of the things, Dan, that we're trying to work on. People at Virginia Commonwealth University are assisting us and we're currently piloting some things so that we believe that we could get an immediate response back to a family if we had the numbers. In other words, if we had the numbers – how much the person was going to earn while they were in work-study or whatever – we could quickly turn around and say, this is what will happen. But please don't run away from that, but pursue it with people who would be knowledgeable of that.

Sandra Weise (Illinois): That assistance would be very beneficial to us in the schools. My name is Sandra Weise (phonetic). I'm in a high school in Southern Illinois and I'm a Work Program Coordinator. I do run into that from time to time where the families are afraid to allow their children to participate in the program because they are afraid their benefits will be cut. So, if we had a way of sitting down with them and showing them that that is not a concern, that would be very beneficial to us.

Bill Halloran: I really feel that this type of support is extremely important. I wouldn't want to see any education personnel having to rely on secondary information to guide families. We're working now and it's in the piloting stage right now, but there will be software that will be user-

friendly that can clearly spell out how income will affect benefits.

Ellie Emanuel: I want to add one comment here before we move on to Jessica. The work incentives program is a way of working, adding in various equipment and support which balances out against the gross income that students might be earning so that the student can continue to get SSI. That's one of the points of the SSI work incentives. So, it's important for people both to look into the SSI benefits and to talk about and learn about the work incentives as a way of encouraging parents and students to think about going to work.

Bill Halloran: In just turning this over, I want to mention one other thing that's important to us. And that is that I think you'll see that the materials that we're putting out and so forth are really intended to assist people to develop a basic understanding of the SSI program and the work incentives. My fear is – and I think that we've had sufficient feedback to validate this – that school personnel feel that this is a fairly complicated thing and they just don't want to get involved with it. But I can't underscore how important it is for individuals who would meet the eligibility to be involved in this program. We're talking about this as the safety net for individuals with more severe disabilities. And the program contains incentives for assisting in getting employment.

The program now develops a presumptive eligibility thing for vocation and rehabilitation services. What I mean by that is, generally speaking, anybody who is on the SSI program is presumed to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. And in fact, to a great extent, this is a very important key to increased independence.

I just want to underscore for those educational

people on this call that even though it might seem like something complicated that might be added to an already overburdened role that you have, this is far too important for people to be in the dark related to this program. And keep in mind, the students that we are talking about probably do not represent any greater than five to eight percent of all of the special education students in our schools. And we can't think of any other place where we can provide the information regarding the program better than the schools, when we have those individuals in our schools.

So, I urge you to please help us in this effort to identify those people who should be benefiting from the program.

Karen Larsen (Michigan): This is Karen Larsen. I just wanted to jump in real quick. I'm one of the cadre of people that Angela just talked about in Michigan that's doing the work incentives training. And I want to underscore what you're saying about people understanding the programs. I would encourage each of you to contact your local Social Security office. We have across the nation liaisons that are trained in work incentives. I'll also offer my phone number – (616) 381-5374, extension 226 – if you want me to get you a name.

Bill Halloran: There are two very important services that are offered by the Social Security Administration. One is the training that was just mentioned, that we have cadres of people from each region in the country who have been trained and whose role it is to provide that type of in-service training to people on the utilization of the employment incentives.

Second, which we're going into right now, are Disability Determination Services people who are in each of the states. And they also have a training

role that they'll be describing as it relates to what the school role should be helping with the determination process.

Ellie Emanuel: Thanks, Bill. That leads us now to our second presenter, Jessica Austin of Disability Determination Services in Ramsey County, Minnesota. Jessica –

Jessica Austin: I feel like I'm doing the prequel to Bill's presentation. This is the "Part One" about process and forms at Disability Determination Services and how we actually make the decision about disability – what steps go into this.

I wanted to briefly address the increase in the volume of requests and the volume of information requested from the schools. The SSI program was created in 1972. At that time, there were 2 million persons receiving SSI benefits. As of 1998 there are 5.2 million persons receiving SSI, including 1 million children. So, this has definitely impacted the volume of requests we send out for all records.

Also, the legal definition of disability has changed, most recently in 1996. Legislation in 1996 provides a stricter definition of disability than the previous definition for children. This resulted in the need to re-determine cases, and resulted in more requests going to schools for record information.

As far as the specific forms and process that we use at Disability Determination Services: Although this is a national program there are going to be some differences from state to state in the look of the forms, wording, et cetera. If you do have a question and are in a different state other than Minnesota, I encourage you to call the Disability Determination Services in that state. And I can provide that information for anyone who is interested.

When we get the disability application – and

Bill has talked about this somewhat – the field office, prior to the application coming to our agency, does an assessment of current work activity. And there is a legal definition of substantial, gainful work, which is five hundred dollars gross. Our clients have to be earning under that amount. At our agency we do not do this investigation. It's done before the claim actually gets to our agency. I encourage anyone who does have questions about the earnings amount and that assessment to call Social Security and discuss it with the staff to see if indeed the individual or their child may be eligible to apply, and that earnings level is not an issue.

When we get the application from the field office, we have professional staff who begin a process that we call "initial development." The application is carefully reviewed for all of the information about sources of medical treatment and other supplementary types of information that is very important to the claim. With most child applicants or older student applicants, information from the schools would be high on our list of information that would be very important in making our determination.

One thing – and Bill had mentioned this also – for the age range that we're discussing today, ages 14 through 21, we are actually working with two slightly different legal definitions of disability. The adult definition applies when the student or young adult reaches the age of eighteen. I won't be going into all the differences today as far as how that impacts our development, but it is a different standard and we are using different medical criteria. There are separate criteria for adults and children.

Because we are looking for medical evidence – and anyone who has received a request from us to a school or a medical facility will notice – we are

interested in clinical findings and test data in addition to observational information from the schools.

When we are at the point of initial development and we have a child – someone under 18 years of age – or if it appears that the person is still dependent on others for supervision and guidance, we have forms that we will send parents, guardians, or other third parties that also ask for information about the applicant's functional level and activities. The areas of function that the childhood disability listing specifies include the following (and this information is really the basis for a lot of the questions that we are asking the schools):

- Cognition communication
- Motor skills, fine and gross
- Social, the ability to form social relationships
- Personal safety issues, and
- Concentration, persistence, and pace in performing tasks.

The disability specialist that is assigned to the claim will usually generate two letters at our agency, and I think this would be similar in other states. This includes a cover letter, which is a computer-generated letter that lists specific records that we would like from the school system. In Minnesota, we have tried to tailor this, customize it, to reflect the names of the records. And I can't comment on consistency of the names throughout the nation. But I know IEPs would be standard information. We are also very interested in the results of psychological testing and hearing and speech evaluations, special education information, and transitional plans. And we know that the list of items that we are asking for can be a long list. Because of the complexity of the childhood regulations and the

level of detail we need, we hope that by listing this information and using the correct name for the record, that we will be able to get the specific records needed for review.

The other form that we send out, and other state agencies send out routinely, is a School Activities Questionnaire. It may have a different name in other states. This is a form that we hope will be completed by the educator professional who knows the student the best. And the form has a number of specific questions on it about the five areas of function that I had mentioned earlier: Cognition; motor skills; social relationships; personal safety; concentration, persistence, and pace. Many of our claims end up being determined on the basis of assessment of these functional areas. And that's why we have such detailed questions about these areas. We also need, in most situations, to get an update within three months. And sometimes the information that we have from the school records will be older than that.

In terms of guidance for professional educators, we are interested in objective observations from the teacher. The person completing the form should be aware this form becomes a document, and part of the disability folder. We want specific information, and quantified. It's more helpful to tell us the percentage of time or times a week that a certain behavior takes place than to make a general statement about that behavior.

I know there have been concerns from the schools about the time required to complete this form and we are well aware of how busy teachers are. We estimate that this takes about ten minutes to complete. And obviously, there are some teachers who would not have time to complete such a form. But for those that do, we do appreciate it. And I

know from our agency staff, I hear that many of the educators are doing a very good job in completing these forms and sending them back, along with the records.

Some more information about our process: Once we start getting records back from the school or other sources of medical treatment where we have requested information, the records are reviewed to see if we could possibly allow a claim. In many cases, again because of the complexity and detail of the medical criteria and the information we need to document a case, we end up setting up consultative examinations. For the population in question, not all but probably the majority of the exams that we set up are psychological assessments with psychological testing, because we do need valid IQ testing in order to document mental deficiency, along with a good clinical interview and mental status findings if the child is of an age where that can be done. At any point in time that we could allow the case, we would proceed with an allowance decision.

If we are not able to allow the case and we have all the record information in – and usually we are looking at going back twelve months from the date of application and collecting this information – when we are at the point in time where we can make a decision, a written notice will be sent to the applicant if they are over age eighteen and don't have a guardian, a parent or a guardian in other situations. If the claim is turned down, the notice will include information about appeal rights.

One of the questions that Ellie gave me was on staff development – what has happened or is occurring within our agency to assist school personnel, parents, and students with understanding our process and forms. And from Bill's comments and

others, obviously people are confused in terms of the type of information that we want and how much detail. Fortunately, or unfortunately, because of the volume of claims that we review, we do have to use form letters to request this information. However, if a parent or a teacher has a question about a specific case, they should contact the disability examiner whose phone number is typically right on the letter that goes out to the schools or the parent. And we are hoping on a one-to-one basis that the questions that the parent or teacher has can be resolved.

Again, we know that teachers are very busy. One of the suggestions I heard from our staff is for the teachers to leave a recorded message stating what times of the day they are available. Our staff are typically able to call and answer questions even with the limited amount of time that teachers have.

Additionally, the local field offices have work incentive liaisons. In order to connect with these liaisons to ask technical questions about work incentives, call (800) 772-1213.

Also, if an educator or another person involved in a counseling situation has a concern about fraud, Social Security has a fraud hotline that can also be contacted and information can be given anonymously. That number is (800) 269-0271.

A pamphlet on childhood disability has been revised. I highly recommend this pamphlet. It's called Childhood Disability: The Supplemental Security Income Program, A Guide for School Professionals. It provides some background on the functional areas and the types of information that we are looking for when we send out forms and requests. To receive this pamphlet, fax your request for publication number 64-049 to this fax number: (410) 965-0696.

The last question Ellie had provided for me was about specific procedures or information required by DDS for students who are turning 18 years of age, who will now be applying for the first time, or whose status will be re-determined by our agency. Bill had talked about this also.

If an individual is turning eighteen and hasn't applied for disability, they should be aware that they will be evaluated under the adult listing. But in terms of the actual procedure itself, there are very few differences from other types of applications.

One thing the parent or student may want to do is to alert the school that there is an application being made so that school personnel will know that a record request will be coming to that school with some specific questions. It would be very helpful if we can get a response to those. Also, as part of the legislation in 1996, continuing disability reviews will be conducted every three years for SSI recipients under the age of eighteen whose conditions are likely to improve. Again, there are forms for this type of reassessment. If the person receiving benefits or someone who is assisting them helps complete the form, we should be getting the information that we need. A payee for a person who is receiving benefits who receives the checks is responsible for presenting evidence that any medically necessary treatment has been received while that person has been in the payee position.

Many of the population in transition that we're discussing today are obviously still in school. And once an individual turns eighteen, we start to look more carefully at work capabilities. Because there are so many claims that involve a mental impairment, I thought I would present the specific mental capabilities that we look at. This would be in a situation where a person doesn't automatically meet

the medical criteria, and we need to get additional information. In most cases, we would be looking to see if that person could do routine unskilled work. So, specific mental capacities we look at are:

- Capacity to understand, remember, and follow instructions;
- Capacity to sustain attention and concentration;
- Capacity to carry out work-like tasks with reasonable persistence and pace;
- Capacity to respond appropriately to co-workers and supervisors; and
- Capacity to tolerate stress in the workplace.

In looking at these criteria, it's very clear that there may be information from a work program at school that would document significant problems in one or more of these areas that may be extremely helpful for our program and our assessment. Again, we are hoping that we can get this type of information from the schools to help with these cases where our clients are over the age of eighteen.

I hope that you've found some of this information helpful or enlightening. And now I'd like to answer any questions you have.

Ellie Emanuel: Thank you, Jessica. So, let's open it up for questions.

Dean Shabbold (Minnesota): My name is Dean Shabbold (phonetic). I'm with St. Paul's Public Schools Transition Independence Program. I have a student who recently received a letter from SSI saying that his benefits were eliminated. I'm wondering how can I help that student who is over eighteen get back into the system? He was making approximately \$670 a month.

Jessica Austin: In that case, it appears to be a technical issue and I don't have an answer to that. I would talk to the parents and see if they've contacted the social security field office to discuss

earnings and what can be done about that. I apologize for not having more specific information on this topic.

Angela Rojas-Edenbach (Michigan): I'm going to tap on Karen Larsen's knowledge also. Without knowing the facts of the case, wouldn't this person be eligible potentially for PASS?

Karen Larsen (Michigan): I'll just real quick jump in here, Jessica. It sounds like this child who was receiving SSI and was working and making \$670 a month very likely may be eligible for a PASS. FJ does not apply to SSI beneficiaries once they are entitled. But earnings of that amount could certainly reduce their SSI benefit to zero. To answer the question fully would take probably forty-five minutes and we'd have to look at the case together. If you want to give me a call, I'd be happy to talk to you. My number is (616) 381-5374, extension 226.

Ellie Emanuel: Thank you, Karen. Let's take one last question, please.

Anonymous: I have a question. I'm a work program coordinator from a school. And I was wondering if anybody is aware of any schools out there that are including representatives from the Social Security office in high school students IEP or annual review meetings in the spring or in exit conferences for seniors?

Mr. Webber (Illinois): I'm from Illinois, but I would guess the number of IEP conferences that are scheduled in the spring, you'd be lucky to get that Social Security liaison to a fourth of those meetings. That's one of the big problems that we face even in rehab, you know, the number of IEPs from fourteen-and-a-half on up to twenty-one are just unreal. And it's difficult to have representation at the table sometimes.

Thomas Golden (New York): In New York

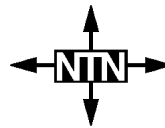
State, our independent living centers are contracted to provide that type of advocacy in monitoring of benefits. And they really participate in the IEP meetings on behalf of SSA and maintain a lot of contact with their offices.

Dean Shabbold (Minnesota): I'm with the St. Paul schools and I've been to hundreds of IEP conferences and don't know of ever seeing anybody from SSA being involved or maybe even being invited.

Ellie Emanuel: Well, we're going to have to end this call. But I would like to thank Bill Halloran and Jessica Austin and all of you for being on this call.

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