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CONTACT: Chris Cooper, 860-250-3860
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Christopher.Cooper@ct.gov

Governor Rell: Funding to Increase Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

Governor M. Jodi Rell and Department of Social Services Commissioner Michael Starkowski announced today that 10 organizations and non-profit agencies have been awarded funding of up to \$200,000 each toward their plans to implement creative ways to help people with disabilities join the workforce. Specific grant amounts will be determined after the selected grantees' strategic plan submissions are reviewed.

"As many employers already know, people with disabilities can be among the most valued workers in a company or organization when given the chance to put their skills to good use," Governor Rell said. "The challenge is to overcome the barriers that stop many people from getting jobs in the first place. Our goal is to foster a job market in Connecticut that is more inclusive than our current environment—one that brings together more people with disabilities and employers in mutually beneficial ways."

Designed to extend the reach of the state's recently-launched Connect-Ability initiative on a local level, organizations from throughout Connecticut answered the Department of Social Services' Bureau of Rehabilitation Services' request for qualifications call in early November.

Successful bidders and the priority areas and communities they will service include:

- Oak Hill/New England Assistive Technology Center will focus on recruiting, hiring and promoting in **Hartford, East Hartford, West Hartford, Bloomfield, Windsor, Wethersfield, New Britain, Farmington and Avon.**
- Padres Abriendo Puertas/Parents Opening Doors in will focus on School to Work Transition in **Hartford and New Britain.**
- The Workplace, Inc. will focus School to Work Transition in lower Fairfield and New Haven towns including **Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bridgeport, Darien, Derby, Easton, Fairfield, Greenwich, Monroe, New Canaan, Norwalk, Oxford, Seymour, Shelton, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, Westport, Weston and Wilton.**
- Connecticut Association of Centers for Independent Living will focus on recruiting, hiring and promoting in the Windham region including **Ashford, Chaplin, Columbia, Coventry, Hampton, Lebanon, Mansfield, Scotland, Willington and Windham.**
- Futures, Inc. will focus on School to work transition in **Hartford.**

- Capitol Region Education Council will focus on school to work transition in the **Bloomfield and Rocky Hill Public Schools.**
- Bristol Community Organization, Inc. will focus on school to work transition in **Bristol and Plymouth.**
- Workforce Alliance will focus on school to work transition and recruiting, hiring and promoting in several towns including **Bethany, Branford, Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, East Haven, Essex, Guilford, Haddam, Hamden, Killingworth, Madison, Meriden, Middlefield, Middletown, Milford, New Haven, North Branford, North Haven, Old Saybrook, Orange, Portland, Wallingford, West Haven, Westbrook and Woodbridge;**
- City of New Haven Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities will focus on School to work transition in **New Haven County.**
- The Arc of New London County will focus on school to work transition in **Norwich, Waterford and Lisbon.**

Bidders were selected based on their proposals for addressing key priority areas including school-to-work transition (for high school students) and recruitment, hiring and promotion of individuals with disabilities. The request for qualifications (RFQ) also mandated organizations to address transportation related to the chosen priority and demonstrate how they can develop and implement local-level strategic plans that address barriers to employment for people with disabilities.

“We’re eager to facilitate connections between employers and able employees,” said Amy Porter, Connect-Ability project director for the state. “These local initiatives will help us achieve Connect-Ability goals in a more meaningful way.”

The Department has awarded contracts of up to \$200,000 each for the development and implementation of local-level strategic plans. The contracts will consist of two phases. The planning phase is anticipated to begin on April 1, 2008 and end up to six months later. The implementation phase will begin upon Department approval of resulting strategic plans and end on December 31, 2009.

About Connect-Ability:

Connect-Ability is an initiative connecting Connecticut employers with the state’s talent pool of people with disabilities. Connect-Ability will open minds by helping employers see the ability, not the disability. The initiative will bring together more resources than ever to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Addressing the fundamental barriers to employment, it is one of the first initiatives of its kind in the nation and a model for other states planning similar efforts. Connect-Ability is funded by a four-year federal grant from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and managed by the Connecticut Department of Social Services. Visit at www.Connect-Ability.com or call toll-free 1-866-844-1903.