What is the Rehabilitation Service Administration, and Why is It Important?

- The **Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)** is a federal subagency within the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS), U.S. Department of Education, that provides leadership in funding and administering programs to assist individuals with disabilities **in gaining employment and living independently.**
- The RSA ensures that people with disabilities receive federally supported **employment services** leading to economic self-sufficiency and community inclusion that **reduces the need for public benefits**.
- The recent firing of RSA staff means that the core legal function under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Rehabilitation Act (WIOA Title IV) **are effectively suspended.**
- These losses **threaten the employment and independence of millions of Americans with disabilities**, worsening inequality and undermining decades of bipartisan disability policy progress.
- Individuals with disabilities fill the **talent needs of employers** and **bolsters the American economy**. If the employment rate of individuals with disabilities increased by 1%, the United States could add nearly **$25 billion to the GDP annually** (analysis by Accenture and National Disability Institute).

What Is Happening Now?

As of October 10, 2025, RSA experienced a massive Reduction in Force (RIF) within OSERS.

- By December 9, 2025, RSA's staff will be reduced from about 60 career professionals to only three, leaving three individuals responsible for administering and monitoring $4.4 billion in federal grants across 78 state agencies.
- The entire RSA data team was terminated, halting the analysis and publication of RSA-911 data, which Congress and the public rely upon to measure the success of VR programs.
- States will no longer have dedicated federal project officers reviewing reports, ensuring compliance, or providing programmatic and fiscal guidance.

Why is the RSA Important?

Nationwide, the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR Program), the largest program administered and monitored by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), serves ***more than one million individuals with disabilities each year***.

RSA is responsible for overseeing programs under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which are funded through the U.S. Department of Education. WIOA provides statutory authority for programs and activities that assist individuals with disabilities in pursuing gainful employment, independence, self-sufficiency, and full integration into community life.

RSA conducts monitoring, provides technical assistance, disseminates information to the public and private nonprofit agencies and organizations, and collaborates with other Federal agencies to facilitate the meaningful and effective participation of individuals with disabilities in employment and the community.

What Happens If RSA Staff Are Removed / Functions Are Disrupted?

Here is how the loss of RSA staff can negatively impact persons with disabilities in the United States:

Function	What Could Fail or Be Weakened	Consequences
Employment programs	• State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program • Supported Employment Services program • American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services program • Randolph-Sheppard Program	Limited administration and monitoring of the 78 State VR agencies. The Federal government covers nearly 80% of the total cost. States share approximately 20% of total expenditures under the program. States will NOT be able to cover 100% of the costs. People currently enrolled and potentially eligible for VR services will lose critical employment services.
Independent Living Services	• Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind program	Services disrupted for grantees who deliver training and independent living (IL) services to individuals who are 55 years of age or older and whose significant visual-related disability makes

		employment difficult to attain, but for whom IL goals are feasible. These services reduce the risk of homelessness or the need for subsidized long-term care.
Technical Assistance, Training, and Support	• Traditionally Underserved Populations • Demonstration and Training programs • Rehabilitation Training Program	Limited programmatic and fiscal monitoring of special demonstration projects that provide comprehensive services (e.g., national technical assistance centers, braille training, parent training) that lead to successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.
Evaluation, Research, and Information Dissemination	• National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM)	Limited facilitation in sharing NEW information and resources for individuals with disabilities and their families, VR personnel, relevant public and private agencies, and the public. A rich online resource that contains training and TA materials, as well as a curriculum beneficial to families and states.
Advocacy and Enforcement	• Client Assistance Program (CAP) • Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights program	Congress created these programs to assist and advocate on behalf of individuals with disabilities. RSA administers these programs. There will be limited RSA administrative support to states on advocacy and enforcement programs. For example, each State governor designates a public or private agency to operate CAP. There are 57 CAPs in 50 States, the American Indian consortium, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories. CAPs assists individuals with disabilities in their relationship with the VR program.

Why This Matters to Persons with Disabilities, Families, and the Community

- Individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to individuals without disabilities.
- In America's public workforce system, state VR programs are a crucial partner to their corresponding state career one-stop centers, which the U.S. Department of Labor funds.
- If state VR programs are significantly impacted, it will create intense pressure on state career one-stop centers to place people with disabilities into employment, with center staff who may lack the necessary disability content expertise and experience in ensuring an accessible pathway to employment.

- Often, individuals with disabilities who are eligible for VR services require vocational training to receive additional specialized support in areas such as job competencies, communication, and time management, which will enable them to work more independently and build their confidence.

What Could or Should Be Done Immediately

1. **Restore RSA staffing and capacity**
   The administration should reverse the mass firings, rehire professionals with expertise, and ensure continuity of operations. The law mandates RSA's functions; abandoning them is not merely an administrative issue—it's a legal and policy problem.
2. **Mobilize stakeholders and public pressure**
   Parents, advocacy groups, disability rights organizations, educators, professional associations, and the public must raise awareness, contact their congressional representatives, and demand that WIOA protections be defended.
3. **Legal and legislative oversight**
   Congress should exercise its oversight authority, hold hearings, require reporting on the status of RSA operations, and, if needed, pass emergency measures to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities.
4. **State and local preparedness**
   State governors and state legislatures, labor agencies, education agencies, professionals who work in the field of VR (i.e., nonprofits/associations), and institutions of higher education should document the current support they receive from RSA.
5. **Ensure transparency and public reporting**
   Reverse the mass firings, rehire the RSA data team and federal project officers to ensure waste, fraud, and abuse do not transpire in the current and subsequent federal funding cycles.

What Can Concerned Individuals Do to Help Make a Difference?

- **Your Voice Matters.** Reach out to your Senator and Congressperson immediately to say that these cuts must be immediately reversed before persons with disabilities and their families suffer, and decades of employment progress are reversed. The firings are slated to be finalized by early December, so ask them to pressure the Trump administration to restore all of them before Thanksgiving.

- **Tell Your Story.** Are you a person with a disability? A family member of a child with a disability? Do you have a neighbor or a loved one with a disability? An employer? Or just someone who cares? Tell your story and how these devastating cuts will directly impact you and others.