

JP-PAS program good for Florida



Your Turn

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Guest columnist

With or without a disability, everyone wants to work in a competitive and integrated environment. For some to achieve this milestone, it can seem impossible.

People with disabilities can face expenses for help with daily living tasks like showering, dressing, using the bathroom and related necessities of \$40,000 per year or more.

With the COVID pandemic, the reasonable and appropriate goal of employment is even harder to achieve for persons with disabilities.

In 2002, the Florida Legislature had the vision and courage to include persons with disabilities in its workforce plans through the James Patrick Memorial Work Incentive Personal Attendant Services and Employment Assistance Program, known as JP-PAS.

The simple goal was to mitigate the barrier of personal care costs for Floridians with disabilities by rewarding the choice of work.

It was a bipartisan success because living with a disability is an equal opportunity disadvantage and has no party affiliation. It is a workforce incentive to equalize the employment field for Floridians with disabilities who require personal care assistance to work.

The brilliance of this initiative is that, not only does

it empower those with significant disabilities to choose work, but it also employs a vast number of other Floridians without disabilities to help those with disabilities, thereby creating a greater inclusive community.

According to the 2019 data from Florida Association for Independent Living Centers, the combined taxable income of the program participants is more than \$4.2 million. The participants also hire an additional 155 Floridians for an average of 1,536 hours per person per year. The average wage is \$15 per hour, which yields nearly another \$3.5 million.

Most all these earnings are spent in Florida. The multiplier effect of the initial investment of \$1.8 million is a 317% return on investment. And it compounds every year!

To maintain our return on the investment, we should not only support programs like JP-PAS, but we should increase its ability to include more participants in the program. Therefore, I ask the Legislature and the public to support SB 794 and HB 427 during the 2021 session.

If the JP-PAS program could retain 100% of the delinquent tax dollars collected — the funding source for this program — more people with disabilities can choose to work. No longer should people with disabilities be burdened simply because they cannot afford to get out of bed, get dressed and go to the bathroom independently.

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