

Jo Anne Barnhart
Commissioner, Social Security Administration
P.O. Box 17703
Baltimore, MD 21235-7703

September 29, 2003

Dear Commissioner Barnhart:

I am writing to support the proposed regulations for **continuation of benefits** for people who are participating in a program of vocational rehabilitation services, employment services, or other support services (published for public comment on August 1, 2003).

The proposed regulations would change the rules which guide how SSA decides to allow continuation of cash benefits for people in vocational or other support training who no longer meet the definition of eligibility for SSI benefits.

I believe that this is a very important proposal and I urge you to publish it as a final rule as soon as possible. Young people with disabilities should remain in school or in vocational training as long as possible to **acquire the skills to become as independent as possible**. This proposed regulation would make it possible for more young people to finish their educational, vocational, or other support training.

Further, SSA could improve assistance to young people with disabilities by including the following in your rules:

- (1) SSA should apply the new rule **retroactively** to young adults who **already** have lost their SSI (and Medicaid), have an IEP, and are not yet 22 years old.
- (2) In some cases, this **protection** should continue if the person moves from an educational setting directly into a vocational rehabilitation program, and SSA's **regulation should allow for this possibility**.
- (3) The new regulation should not be limited to students with disabilities who are enrolled in special education classes - it should protect any young person who is losing his or her SSI disability benefit at age 18 and is enrolled in school or

an appropriate employment or vocational >program. (4) The language of the regulation should be broad enough to >benefit students with disabilities who are enrolled in a private or parochial school and may not have an IEP.

Sincerely,

Lisa B. Longwill

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