



**Digital Accessibility Legal Summit,  
American University Washington  
College of Law**

Comments by Professor Douglas Kruse, Rutgers  
School of Management and Labor Relations

October 7, 2021

# Overview of brief comments

- 1. Digital divide: lower internet access among people with disabilities**
- 2. Telework patterns by disability status, before and during pandemic**
- 3. New employment research: three multi-year grants on public policy, assistive technology, and employer policies**

# 1. Digital divide: lower internet access among people with disabilities

People with disabilities were more likely to live in homes without internet access in 2019:

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
All ages	17.3%	6.3%
Working-age (18-64)	12.1%	5.2%

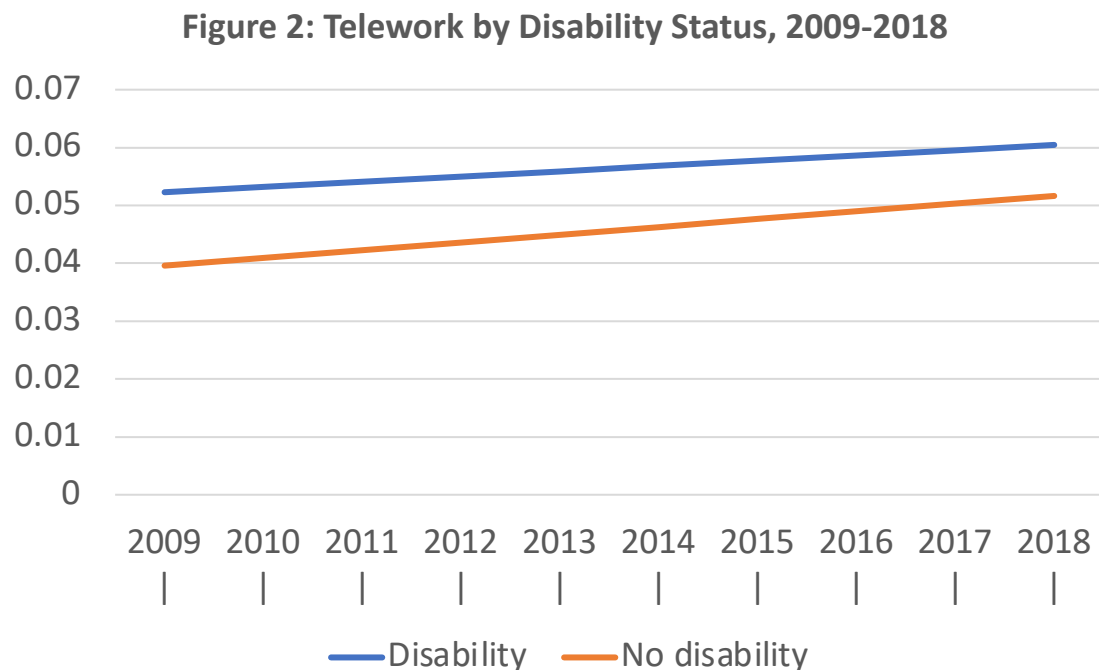
They were also more likely to not be accessing the internet from any location in 2019:

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
Age 15+	39.3%	19.5%
Working-age (18-64)	30.3%	16.3%

Sources: Analysis of microdata from Census Bureau’s American Community Survey and Current Population Survey Computer Supplement

## 2. Pre-pandemic telework patterns by disability status

Workers with disabilities were more likely to work primarily from home, though gap has been closing a bit over time:



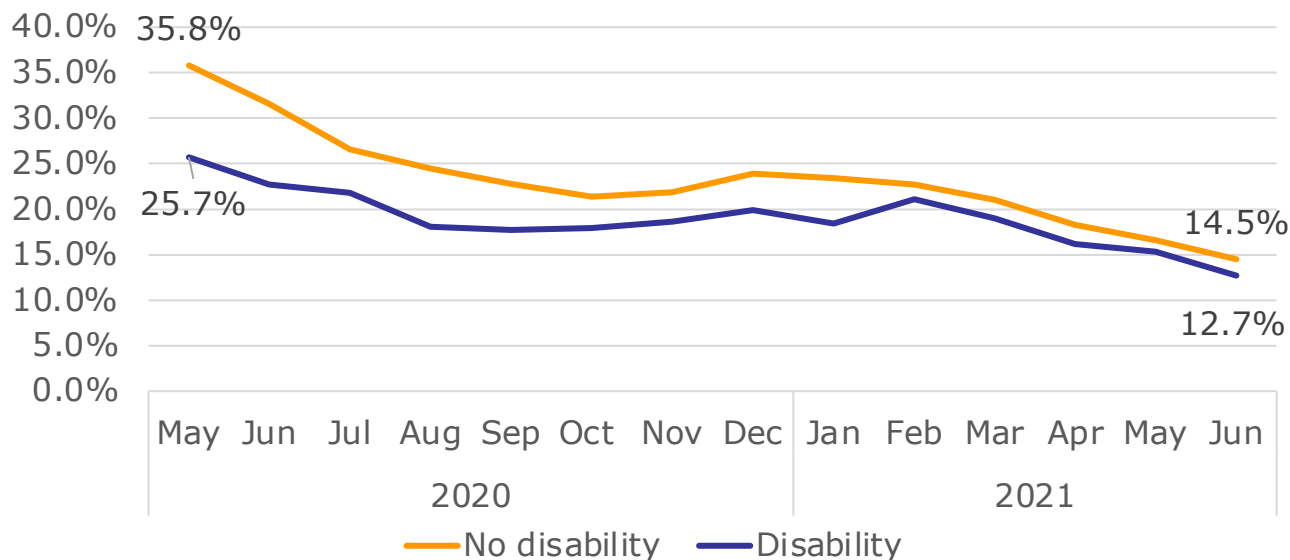
Based on analysis of Census Bureau's American Community Survey. From Lisa Schur, Mason Ameri, and Douglas Kruse. "Telework after COVID: a "silver lining" for workers with disabilities?" *Journal of occupational rehabilitation* 30, no. 4 (2020): 521-536

BUT a big limit on potential for expanding telework among workers with disabilities:

- Only one-third (34%) are in jobs where essential tasks can be done primarily at home, compared to two-fifths (40%) of workers without disabilities (based on O\*Net data analyzed by Dingel and Neiman, 2020)
- Why? Workers with disabilities are disproportionately in service and blue-collar jobs that cannot be done at home (e.g., food service, home health aides, manufacturing)

As a result of occupational differences, workers with disabilities were less likely to be teleworking during the pandemic:

**Percent Working at Home Because of the Pandemic**



Based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data analyzed in Douglas Kruse, So Ri Park, Yana Rodgers, and Lisa Schur, "Disability and Remote Work During the Pandemic with Implications for Cancer Survivors," forthcoming in *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*

What does this mean for telework and disability in the post-pandemic era?

- COVID pandemic was a blow to all workers, but may ultimately have a “silver lining” for some workers with disabilities if it makes work from home easier and more acceptable.
- But potential is limited by current types of jobs held by workers with disabilities
- More broadly, the pandemic is shaking up traditional workplace structures and may cause employers to rethink how essential tasks can be done, which may expand their views of workplace accommodations.

### **3. New employment research at Rutgers, Syracuse, Harvard, and CUNY**

Two 5-year Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers, funded by U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services:

#### **A. Employer Practices and Disability Center**

- Studying effects of year-by-year changes in policies among 200 large companies
- Implementing randomized experiments on job ads, company communications, and disability training in several companies

#### **B. Disability Inclusive Employment Policy (DIEP) Center**

- Studying public policies affecting disability employment, including telework, paid leave, contingent work, minimum wage, UI, others



## More new employment research

Also 4-year project with CUNY, funded by NSF:

### **C. Assistive Technology in the Workplace**

- Studying potential of assistive technology to increase employment, productivity, and wages of people with disabilities
- Project is stimulated by development of “wearable robot” by CUNY engineers: a high-tech jacket that helps functioning for people with upper body impairments
- We’ll be looking at economic and policy implications—both public policies and workplace HR policies

***Thank you!***

