



The SMLR Program for Disability Research

Presentation to SMLR State Advisory
Council, June 16, 2021

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Overview of presentation

- 1. Introduction to Program for Disability Research**
- 2. Context: economic, social, and political inclusion of people with disabilities**
- 3. Recent employment research: field experiment on hiring, union membership, job losses during COVID-19, telework**
- 4. New employment research: two multi-year grants on public policy and assistive technology, plus submitted proposal for 5-year grant on employer policies**
- 5. Recent voting research: turnout and accessibility issues in 2020 election**

Questions to think about for discussion at end:

1. What types of initiatives by employers, unions, policy-makers, and other stakeholders would help increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
2. Will employers be rethinking the structure of workplaces following the pandemic, and how might this help and/or hurt people with disabilities?
3. What are the best ways to collaborate with employers, unions, policy-makers, and other stakeholders in designing, carrying out, and disseminating disability research?

Introduction to Program for Disability Research

- Established in 2000
- Over \$20 million in grants, with focus on employment of people with disabilities
- **“Most prolific institution”**: A 2020 peer-reviewed journal article by researchers in Spain ranked Rutgers #1 in the world for disability and employment research published in the past three decades, led by the Program for Disability Research.
- We are committed to making research results useful and having a real-world impact
- Program research has been cited in over 400 media articles in past 5 years, including *New York Times*, *PBS NewsHour*, *Time*, *USA Today*, and international news outlets

The Rutgers disability employment research includes studies of:

- Corporate culture
- Telework and contingent work
- Union membership
- Occupational projections
- Job requirements and pay disparities
- Employer attitudes toward job applicants
- Intersectionality of disability with gender, race, and ethnicity

We also study voter turnout and other forms of political participation, with particular attention to the effects of employment through increasing economic resources, civic skills, social connections, and feelings of political efficacy

Context

- There are over 1 billion people with disabilities worldwide, and 61 million in the United States
- The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has led to great improvements in the accessibility of public accommodations such as stores, restaurants, and public transportation
- The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has also spurred many forms of progress worldwide.

But . . .

Context: Little economic progress

Despite advances in some areas, people with disabilities have made little economic progress.

- Only one-third of U.S. working-age people with disabilities are employed, less than half the rate of people without disabilities.
- Employed people with disabilities are overrepresented in low wage and contingent jobs with little opportunity for advancement
- One-fourth of people with disabilities live in poverty—twice the rate of people without disabilities.

Context: Limited political involvement

Lack of economic inclusion contributes to lack of political and social inclusion:

- Voter turnout among citizens with disabilities is 6-8 points lower than among citizens without disabilities
- Also, lower civic engagement in general, and greater social isolation

Recent employment research

"The disability employment puzzle: A field experiment on employer hiring behavior," Ameri et al., *ILR Review* (2018)

- Submitted fictitious job applications in 2013 for 6,016 accountant positions in response to job ads by U.S. employers
- Applications identical except one-third mentioned having spinal cord injury in cover letter, one-third mentioned having Asperger's, and one-third did not mention disability
- These disabilities were chosen because they would not be expected to affect productivity in an accounting job

- Applicants with disabilities were 26% less likely to receive expressions of employer interest
- Disability gap in employer interest was largest among small private sector firms (not covered by ADA)
- Results point to extra difficulties in attracting employer interest among job applicants with disabilities, even when highly skilled and the disability is unlikely to affect employee productivity
 - ⇒ Consistent with other evidence they are often “last hired, first fired”
- Study was featured in *NY Times* article.

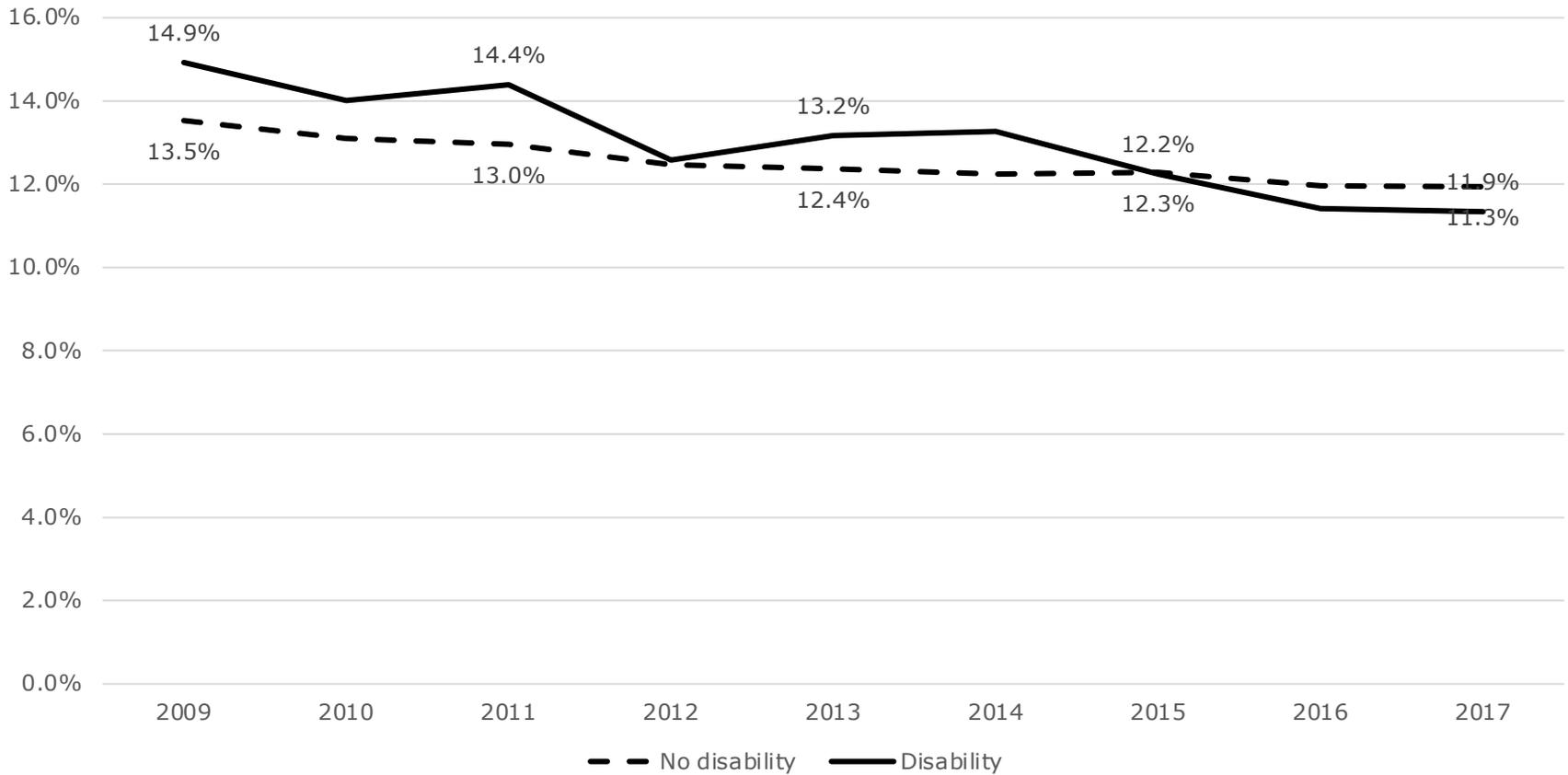
Recent employment research (cont.)

“Disability and the Unionized Workplace,” with Mohammad Ali and Mason Ameri, 2020

Using merged 2009-2017 data from Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, we find:

- Workers with disabilities were slightly more likely to be union members during this period (13.0% compared to 12.5% for those without disabilities)
- But unionization decline was faster among workers with disabilities (3.6% compared to 1.6%)

Figure 1: Trend in disability union coverage



Why the greater decline? Following workers over time we find:

- Union workers with disabilities were more likely than other union workers to stay employed and remain in union job one year later
- But non-union workers with disabilities were less likely than other non-union workers to be hired into a union job
 - ⇒ In union setting, workers with disabilities MORE likely to be “last hired” but LESS likely to be “first fired”
 - ⇒ Indicates employers may be especially reluctant to hire workers with disabilities into jobs with union protections

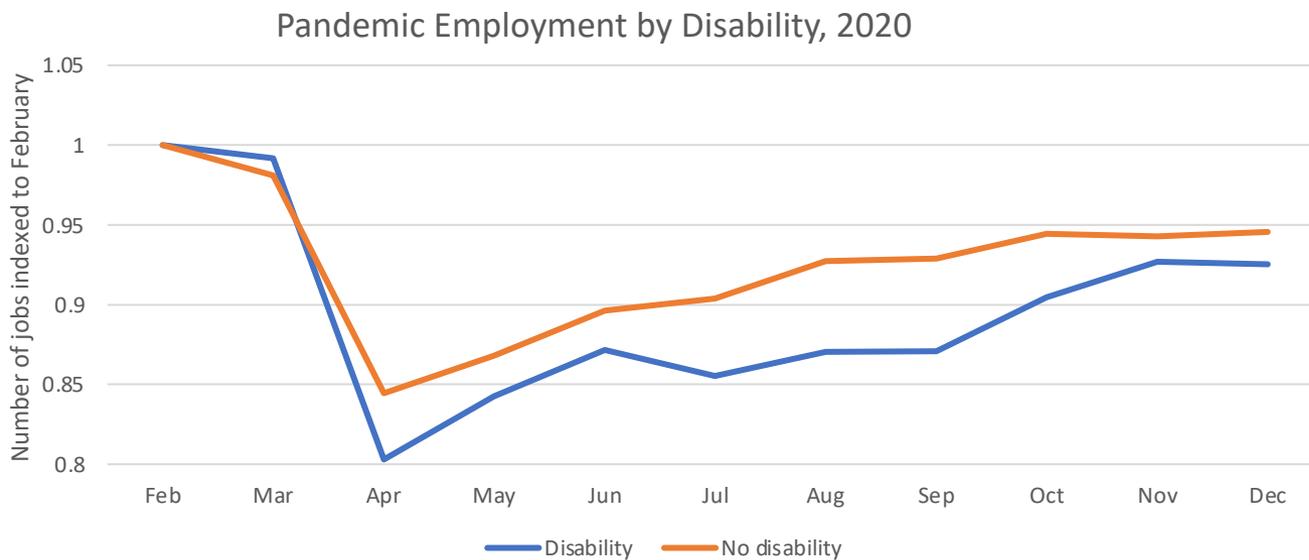
We also find:

- The union wage premium is higher for workers with disabilities (30% higher pay for workers with disabilities compared to 24% for those without disabilities)
- This decreases but does not eliminate disability pay gap (6% lower pay for workers with disabilities in union setting compared to 10% lower in nonunion setting)
- Union workers with disabilities are more likely than nonunion workers to request accommodations, indicating “voice face” of unions may have extra value for workers with disabilities
- Most union contracts focus on helping current members who become injured, not job applicants with disabilities

Recent employment research (cont.)

“COVID-19 and Employment Losses Among Workers with Disabilities: An Intersectional Approach,” with Yana Rodgers

- Social and economic losses due to Covid-19 around globe
 - Disproportionately borne by women, minorities, low-income groups
- Before pandemic: large disability employment gap
 - Earlier recessions: people with disabilities hit harder with job losses
 - Disability employment gap widened up through 2015, then started to close
- But pandemic appears to have erased this progress



Employment dropped more, and recovered more slowly, among workers with disabilities after onset of pandemic

From analysis of Current Population Survey data

More detailed analysis shows:

- White and Black women with disabilities bore a heavier burden of employment losses during the pandemic
- About one-fourth of the greater employment drop for workers with disabilities was due to occupation: more likely to be in blue-collar and service jobs that were especially hard-hit by pandemic
- Another quarter due to differences in education, industry, and other personal characteristics
- But still large unexplained gap in employment drop, consistent with prior evidence that people with disabilities are “last hired, first fired”

3. Recent employment research (cont.)

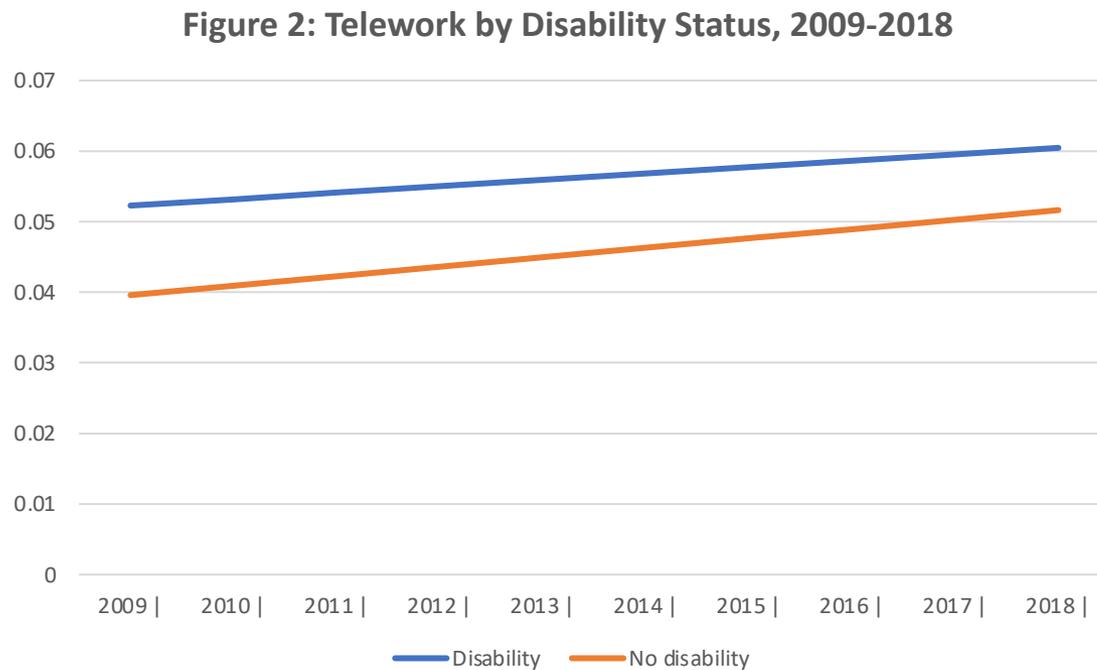
"Telework after COVID: A 'silver lining' for workers with disabilities?" with Mason Ameri. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 2020.

Home-based work may have particular advantages for some workers with disabilities:

- Reduced commuting time and expense
- Increased flexibility for those who need frequent breaks from work, medical or therapy appointments, or to remain close to medical equipment at home

But downsides as well: social isolation, blurred lines between family and work, being "out of sight, out of mind" for raises, promotions, training

Workers with disabilities are 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

- Higher rate of home-based work among workers with disabilities remains after controlling for demographic factors and occupation
 - Workers with disabilities earn less than those without disabilities in both arrangements:
 - 13.5% among home-based workers
 - 10.4% among on-site workers
- ⇒ So home-based work doesn't rectify the disability pay gap
- ⇒ But it still may increase employment opportunities

What's the potential for greater home-based work to increase employment among people with disabilities?

- 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 still need to address pay disparities and other downsides of home-based work
- Also, potential is limited by job type: only 34% of workers with disabilities are currently in jobs with high potential for telework, compared to 40% of workers without 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.

New employment research

Disability Inclusive Employment Policy (DIEP) Center

5-year center with Syracuse and Harvard Universities, funded by U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (\$4.3 million over 2020-2025)

Overall goal: study the effects of public policies on the employment of people with disabilities, with a focus on facilitating better employment outcomes

Rutgers projects in DIEP:

- a) state-level policies on paid sick leave and paid family leave—e.g., in states like NJ that adopted paid family leave, how have the employment and earnings of people with disabilities been affected relative to states without these policies?
- b) telework and other home-based work—including new survey data collection from employees
- c) contingent work—how is it affected by efforts to provide greater protections?
- d) unemployment insurance—with focus on role of 2020 CARES Act expansion of UI on incomes and job search of people with disabilities
- e) minimum wages—with focus on effects of state-level minimum wage increases as well as policies that restrict the use of sub-minimum wages for people with disabilities under the FLSA 14(c) program.

More new employment research

Assistive Technology in the Workplace

4-year project with CUNY, funded by the National Science Foundation

- The goal is to study the 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
- At Rutgers we’ll be looking at economic and policy implications (both public policies and workplace policies):
 - Using large-scale government datasets to analyze the effects of specific impairments and the potential for assistive technology to improve employment and earnings of people with disabilities
 - Talking to companies and employees about HR implications of how to integrate assistive technology in the workplace, and who should pay for it

New proposal

We've applied for another \$4.3 million 5-year grant from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create an Employer Policies Center studying how employer policies and practices affect employment of people with disabilities

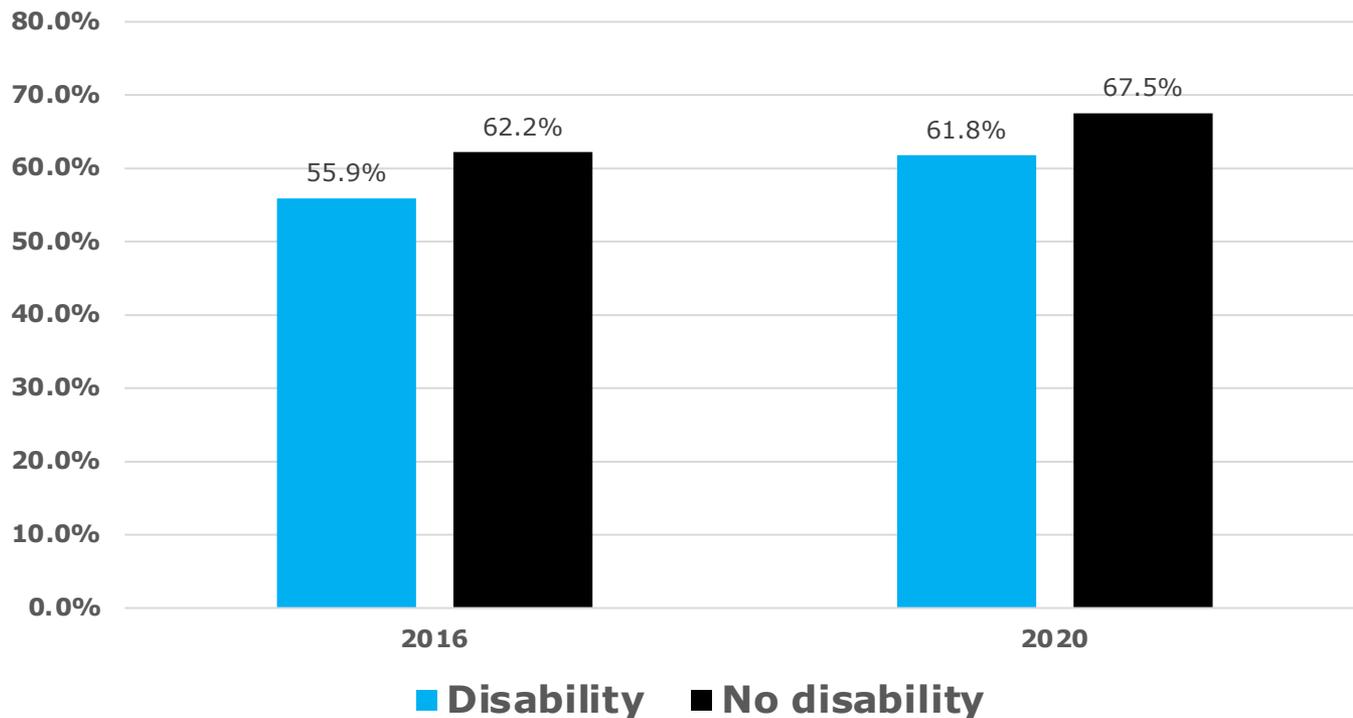
The Center would be based at Rutgers, with Syracuse and Harvard Universities as partners, along with National Organization on Disability that includes 200 major U.S. companies as members

If funded, the research will include (among other things):

- Tying year-by-year changes in policies to disability outcomes among 200 companies
- Implementing randomized experiments on job ads, company communications, and disability training in several companies

Voting research

Persistent disability voting gap of 6-8 points in national elections:

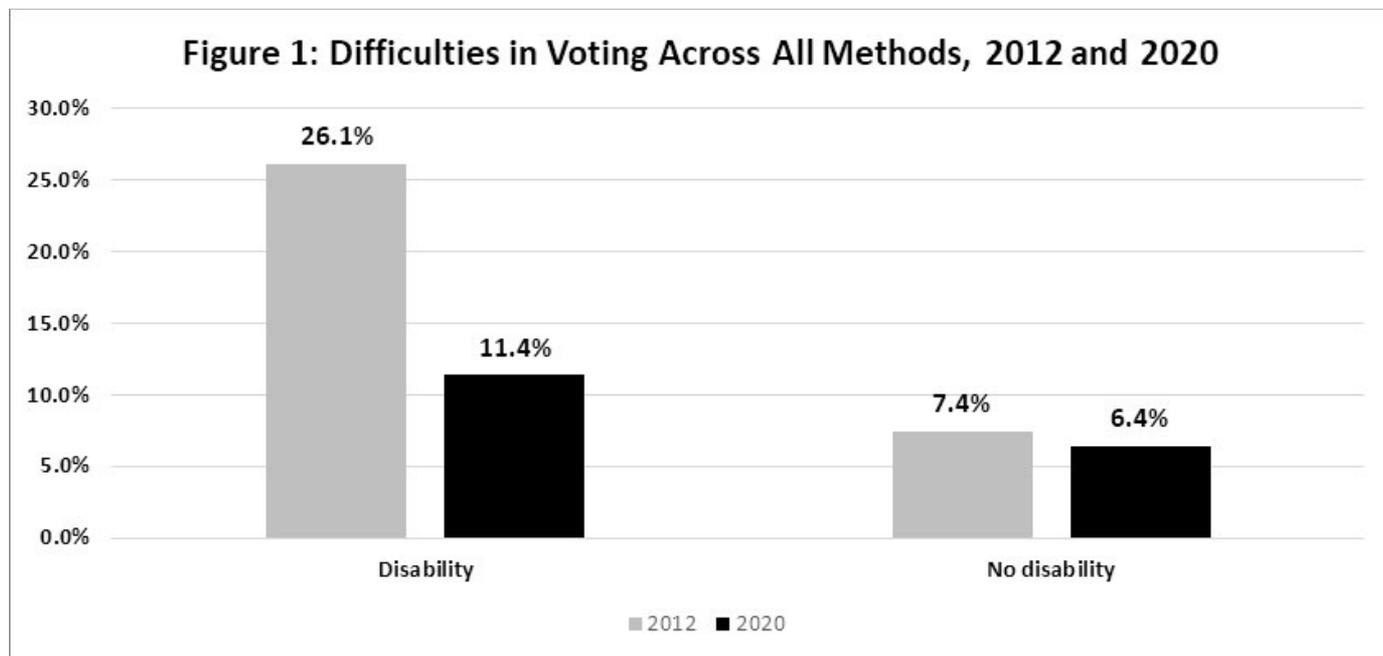


Research findings:

- Disability voting gap is only partly explained by gaps in education and economic resources: social isolation and sense of political efficacy also important
- Employment plays critical role for people with disabilities: there is no voting gap between employed people with and without disabilities
 - ⇒ indicates importance of economic resources, social connections, and feelings of efficacy gained through work
- Inaccessible voting systems also discourage turnout, sending the message the people with disabilities are not expected to participate

From 2012 and 2020 national post-election surveys conducted by Rutgers on behalf of U.S. Election Assistance Commission:

- Voting difficulties declined significantly among voters with disabilities from 2012 to 2020
- But they are still almost twice as likely as people without disabilities to have difficulties



So, people with disabilities continue to face gaps in economic and political inclusion, particularly employment and voting.

Questions for SAC discussion:

1. What types of initiatives by employers, unions, policy-makers, and other stakeholders would help increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
2. Will employers be rethinking the structure of workplaces following the pandemic, and how might this help and/or hurt people with disabilities?
3. What are the best ways to collaborate with employers, unions, policy-makers, and other stakeholders in designing, carrying out, and disseminating disability research?

Thank you!

