



**Written Testimony  
To  
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means  
Social Security Subcommittee  
Encouraging Work Through the SSDI Program  
Hearing June 19, 2013**

**Submitted By:  
The National Employment Network Association (NENA)  
725 Lewis Street, Eugene OR 97402  
602-443-0711 – [www.nenaticket.com](http://www.nenaticket.com)  
July 3, 2013**

The National Employment Network Association (NENA) submits this written testimony with regard to the Ticket to Work (TTW) Program.

NENA is a membership association representing the more than 650 Employment Networks (ENs) around the country. NENA provides education and peer mentoring services to ENs that are SSA contractors through the Ticket to Work (TTW) Program. NENA promotes best practices among ENs to encourage quality and effectiveness. NENA conducts surveys of our members and operates several committees to develop regular collaboration and recommendations to SSA and MAXIMUS to improve Program policies, regulations, operations, and beneficiary marketing.

Our testimony primarily responds to elements of the joint testimony delivered at this hearing by Bob Williams, SSA's Associate Commissioner of the Office of Employment Support Programs, and David Weaver, Associate Commissioner of the Office of Program Development and Research. A significant part of their testimony outlined oversight policies implemented in response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report in May, 2011. In that report and in the GAO's testimony before this subcommittee on September 23, 2011, the GAO discussed SSA's lack of sufficient oversight of the TTW Program.

SSA's response to the GAO report includes a number of policies designed to ensure that ENs are delivering quality services and adhering to Performance Indicators that GAO said were not yet developed. NENA provided written testimony in response to that report and the hearing comments by expressing our

concern that too much oversight (bureaucracy) in an outcome-based program discourages the flexibility ENs need to partner with beneficiaries in the individualized manner that works for each ticket holder.

Nearly two years following that hearing we find that our fears of too much oversight were warranted. The oversight policies have resulted in the following:

1. According to a recent study NENA conducted using actual EN data we found that ENs on average spend 42% of our time on administrative activities and only 58% directly serving beneficiaries. ENs have been forced to stymie any growth and some have downsized staff and reduced their number of tickets because of the increased administrative requirements.
2. According to SSA's testimony, there are only 653 ENs practicing as of May 31, 2013 as opposed to a high in 2010 of 1,603. SSA terminated contracts with hundreds of ENs that had less than ten tickets or who did not respond to SSA's requests to discuss their contract. Why would providers who signed up to be ENs not respond to SSA's attempts to contact them? Why would so many ENs have such a low number of tickets? NENA has no empirical data to answer those questions. Anecdotally, however, we know that ENs dropped out because of administrative complexity and burden. Lack of beneficiary inquiries due to changes in SSA's marketing methods seriously diminished ENs' ability to continue operating.
3. SSA's new EN qualification requirements in the August 27, 2012 Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) are so stringent that most of the more than 600 Centers for Independent Living and hundreds of mental health agencies cannot qualify. Very few even bother to apply.
4. SSA's BPA is so prescriptive that it strangles the individualized approach needed to succeed even though other elements of the BPA demand it. For example, SSA dictates that ENs should provide services that lead to career-level jobs. This goal is unrealistic and causes ENs to refuse tickets from ticket holders whose goal is to get off benefits but have no desire to pursue upward mobility. The decision is up to the ticket holder as long as they are happy and they are working towards getting off benefits, that should be a sufficient goal. ENs should not be judged as low performers by helping someone get a job they like versus getting a job that someone else thinks they should have.

5. SSA's increased documentation requirements for ENs to get paid have added more layers of proof that we are entitled to the payments claimed, such that ENs are forced to forgo payments or wait inordinate amounts of time, sometimes with multiple appeals, to receive them.
6. SSA's August 27, 2012 BPA shifted responsibility for beneficiary marketing to ENs. The new BPA requires ENs to identify in a business plan how we will market the program – an additional expense for already struggling providers. Instead, ENs experienced a noticeable slowdown in beneficiary inquiries after SSA stopped mailing Tickets to beneficiaries and opted instead to use an algorithm to target beneficiaries based on certain criteria and use Robo-calls for outreach. SSA is still attempting to figure out why the calls to ENs are so low when they say there are thousands of responses to the calls fielded by the call center.

In essence, in an attempt to follow the GAO recommendations SSA's oversight policies have punished the sins of a few at the expense of the majority trying to help beneficiaries succeed in an individualized way that treats them with respect and guides their efforts to achieve self-supporting employment. Further, the practices of a small number of ENs whose methods GAO questioned are still operating and still hold a large percentage of the tickets assigned. NENA makes no judgment about the business model of any EN. However, as of April 30, 2013 nineteen ENs held 34.5% of the tickets assigned to ENs. SSA's escalated oversight attempts have only served to drive away ENs that signed up in good faith and discourages others from applying.

Oversight is important. But focus should remain on the fact that this is an outcome-based program. Administrative burden in data collection and requesting payments must not continue in its current direction. It makes the program too expensive for ENs to operate. Care must be taken not to make Program oversight so stringent to avoid wrongdoing that it destroys the flexibility ENs need to do whatever the ticket user needs to succeed.

When reading the GAO report upon which SSA based all these oversight changes, it is clear that SSA is attempting to comply with the GAO recommendations. The problem is that the GAO recommendations are based on a service provision model that pays providers for services. This program is not designed to pay ENs based on services they provide or how many hours they spend providing those services. It only pays for outcomes – that is, getting beneficiaries to work and helping them stay there. NENA contends that the attempt to follow GAO's misdirected recommendations prohibits achieving the very goals intended and creates an environment that only allows very limited services to be provided due to the administrative burdens of proving we are providing services.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Testimony Submitted By:

Paul Luttrell  
NENA Chairman of the Board  
Associate Vice President  
Adelante Development Center  
Albuquerque NM  
505-449-4024  
[pluttrell@godelante.org](mailto:pluttrell@godelante.org)

Susan Webb, MBA, JD  
NENA President  
Director  
ABIL Employment Services  
Phoenix AZ  
602-443-0711  
[susanw@abil.org](mailto:susanw@abil.org)