

**SAMPLE RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
ON RANDOLPH-SHEPPARD AND JWOD POLICY**

IMPORTANT: RESPONSE DEADLINE IS MARCH 1, 2006

Director
Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy
3060 Defense Pentagon
Attn: Ms. Susan Pollack
Washington, DC 20301-3060

Dear Director:

I am a blind vendor operating a vending facility in (**insert city and State**). This is a response to the request in the Federal Register on February 3, 2006 for suggestions on policy related to military mess hall and military troop dining operations as required by Congress in the FY 2006 National Defense Authorization Act (P. L. 109-63).

As you know, the Randolph-Sheppard Act requires Federal agencies to give the blind priority in the operation of vending and other retail facilities on Federal property. This priority has in many cases been ignored by Federal agencies, including those in the Department of Defense. There are fewer than 2,600 blind vendors in the country now. These blind business people operate cafeterias, snack bars, highway vending, and a few troop dining contracts. The Javits-Wagner-O'Day program provides supported work for some 40,000 people whose disabilities have been determined to be so severe that they are unable to work in competitive jobs. The nature of the two programs is completely different.

It is important for you to understand the value of the Randolph-Sheppard program to the blind of this country. We believe that it is the most effective employment program ever devised for blind people. Were it not for the blind vending facility program, thousands of blind people would not have been able to support their families, pay taxes, and be independent. Yet, current analysis indicates that as many as eighty (80) percent of working age blind persons are without employment, and many of these are totally dependent on Federal and state resources. The Randolph-Sheppard program cannot begin to support these many thousands of blind people, even if it were dramatically expanded.

I would like for you to consider carefully what the Randolph-Sheppard program means to me personally, and to my family.

(Insert your experience with the program, what you do, how many people you employ, who they are [especially if they have a disability] and describe what the program has meant to you)

America's national organizations of and for the blind are supporting legislation that could greatly expand employment of blind people in this country, and provide jobs for severely physically and mentally disabled people as well. Your working group reporting to Congress would do a great service to the blind of America by expressing support for the ideas these organizations have developed. Among those ideas is the establishment of business and employment enterprises that would be required to have one-third of their employees be disabled. These could certainly include, and very likely would include, people now working under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day program.

We agree with the expressed policy of the Office of Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy requiring the use of JWOD community rehabilitation programs as subcontractors to State licensing agencies when military troop feeding contracts are awarded under the Randolph-Sheppard Act, preserving the priority under that Act.

Whatever policy you recommend to the Congress, please ensure that the Randolph-Sheppard program is preserved for the thousands who benefit from it, and for those who follow.

Sincerely,