>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Well, good afternoon and welcome to the RespectAbility webinar for July 20th 2022. My name is Philip Kahn-Pauli. I am the Senior Director of Federal Policy for RespectAbility and I am so delighted to be joined here today by Eric and Sara and Mark, and specifically talking about ABLE accounts and the ABLE today effort. I am so delighted that we are in a position as a disability community, as an audience, as a panel of experts who -- they -- you all are the experts in these issues, not me -- to talk about financial security and workers with disabilities. You know, the news today is challenging. You hear talk about inflation, concerns about -- is there going to be a recession in the near future -- the what's -- volatility in the stock market, but all of those conversations are critically important for millions of Americans with disabilities. Because thanks to the ABLE act, the ability to Achieve a Better Life Experience Act passed several years ago by Congress, people with disabilities can actually create tax-free savings accounts in ways that they never were able to do before. They're actually able to save money and actually address costs that are associated with living with a disability. And this means financial security, financial stability, and opportunity for millions of people with disabilities. But the issue is that a lot of people aren't aware of ABLE. Just by ABLE being around for a good number of years now, we need to increase the number of people with disabilities who hold ABLE accounts, people who better understand financial security, and are fully trained in how to be financial stewards of their own money and to earn an income and achieve independence. So towards this topic, towards this end, I've gathered together today a panel of some really groundbreaking experts who are working on these issues who are leading the effort nationally to get more people with disabilities financially secure thanks to ABLE. We have with us today Eric Ochmanek, Director of ABLE today. He leads this effort. Before -- working on ABLE, he worked for BP, he worked for the White House Office of Presidential Advance, he worked for HHS. He's coming to join us today from the great state of Michigan. Likewise we have Sara Hart Weir, national outreach lead for ABLE today. Sara has been around the disability space for quite some time -- former president and CEO of the National Down Syndrome Society. She was instrumental in the bipartisan passage of the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act in 2014. she's been a candidate for public office, she has been a national leader in public-private partnerships deal people with disabilities have a fair shot at the American dream. Her credentials, along with Eric's credentials, are all up on our website, and definitely check it out. Also joining us today is Mark Raymond Jr., who's the National Outreach Lead for ABLE today. Mark is a quadriplegic who understands what it means to join the disability community at any time due to accident, illness, or aging. He has transformed his life experience into the foundation of the Split Second Foundation, and is dedicated to making people aware of the disability community, which is too often an invisible population -- advocating for their rights, funding cutting-edge research, and really -- through his lived experience and through his advocacy -- providing clear-cut steps to impacting people's lives. I am going to get off the mic now, I'm going to turn it over to Mark and Eric and Sara. You've got the reigns, take it away, and talk to us about ABLE today.

>> Eric Ochmanek: Well thank you Philip, and thank you Eric for all your hard work on behind the scenes, and also for Gabe too. I know Gabe can be working hard this next hour, so we really appreciate Gabe's assistance. My name is Eric Ochmanek. I'm the program director for ABLE today, which is a new national initiative that's housed at the National Association of State Treasurers, which we're going to get into here in a second. On the next slide, it talks about who we are and and where we do have our mission statement from. So for ABLE today, we believe that empowering people with disabilities also includes giving them the choices to live a more inclusive life, and also giving them the ability to have financial empowerment. The National Association of State Treasurers partnered with Wells Fargo Bank to initiate and found ABLE today just earlier this year, and Sara and I and Mark joined together last month in San Antonio, Texas to officially launch this initiative. So for Philip, we really appreciate the opportunity to be here on one of our first national webinars. For myself, I helped start the first ABLE program in the country, which was in Ohio back in 2016. And both Sara and I have been tirelessly, you know, traveling the country. I myself traveled to every single county in Ohio talking about the benefits of ABLE. So thanks again Philip for being here -- for having us be here. Next slide. So if you're here today or if you talk to anybody in the disability community, anyone who wants any information about financial empowerment, we believe that ABLE accounts should be an option for them. And if you are a person with a disability, that as of right now plans your finances month to month, if you're worried about losing Medicaid or SSI because of money in a bank or resources, if you're a family member that has a person with a disability, or maybe you're a caregiver or support person that helps people with disabilities, or if you're a disability benefits provider -- you know, maybe you do work for SSI or Medicaid, or maybe you're a financial advisor, or maybe you do work in the special trust community, all of these people -- anyone in the disability community deserves a right and also an opportunity to hear about what an ABLE account is, and the impacts that can provide not only their life but the disability community in general. Sara?

>> Sara Hart Weir: Great, thank you Eric. So throughout our presentation, we really want listeners in the audience to learn a little bit about -- a little bit more about ABLE accounts, ABLE today. But throughout the course of the next 40 minutes or so, we want to hearken back to two specific examples. Everybody -- and Eric and I have experienced this over the years -- wants to be able to understand and absorb how you might be able to utilize an ABLE account in your life. So Mark will be kind of jumping in here a little bit more momentarily talking about our friends Amanda and Dalton here, two examples. As you'll see, Amanda here is 13 years old. She happens to have a physical disability and will utilize Medicaid services throughout her life. At 13 years old, Amanda's parents are saving for her to go to college. And obviously they are also concerned about who will support and care for Amanda when they are no longer here. Amanda's parents want to be able to plan for her future. The second example that we'll point to throughout the course of this discussion -- and I know we have -- we'll have some questions throughout in the chat box and Philip is going to have some questions for us toward the end of the presentation. But on a separate example, we wanted to present Dalton. Dalton is 34 years old. He happens to have a developmental disability, and is currently working. Dalton receives SSI as well and utilizes this for his monthly rent payments. He wants to be able to purchase his own home one day, but because of SSI limits, Dalton can -- cannot save for that down payment. So we'll talk about that in the context of how ABLE may be able to help Dalton reach his hopes and dreams. So as we kind of go along, we wanted to give you just a broad overview of what ABLE is. And this is a tool that will allow you to save your own money in your own name, more than that two thousand dollar -- that asset limitation that we often talk about. ABLE is also a tool that helps you accumulate wealth without losing the benefits. And we'll go on -- we'll go into this presentation a little bit more into some of the nuances with SSI and Medicaid and how that impacts eligibility with ABLE as a tool in the toolbox. And then of course, if you're a person with a disability, a family member or caregiver, I am sure you've heard the term spend down over the -- over the course of your lifetime. We'll talk about how ABLE can work without having to spend down your current or your future income. Really, this is all about moving from a monthly financial plan to a lifetime financial plan. And our hope is here that ABLE accounts make this all possible. What is ABLE? I think it's a great place to start. But ABLE accounts are a saving and an investment tool, and we'll go into more specifics on the investment side of the ABLE equation here momentarily. But it's a tool that we started working on in 2006, so a long long time, but it was a tool that was enabled by some federal legislation, and then subsequently some state laws that helped authorize ABLE accounts and ABLE programs to begin. And the ultimate goal with ABLE is to be able to save money without -- without impacting federal benefits. The original legislation that was passed that Philip referenced in 2014 amended the federal tax code under section 529 to allow these accounts to be possible. So what does ABLE look like today? And we wanted you to have this snapshot before we went into the more specifics. 46 states and the District of Columbia currently offer ABLE programs. And this allows for -- ABLE programs are offered in each state with some national or nationwide offerings as well. Today and -- this data point changes every single day, but the most recent statistics are we have 120,000 total ABLE accounts across the country. And we're just really grateful to RespectAbility for allowing us to talk a little bit more and expand the education and awareness to the disability community about the benefits of ABLE. And then finally, we're really excited -- another number that continues to grow over time -- we have over 1 billion dollars in nationwide savings in ABLE accounts. As somebody who's worked on this for a very long time, I think that number is very powerful, because it shows the wealth that people with disabilities, their families and caregivers can ultimately save, and plan for that long-term savings. Lastly, before I turn it back over to Eric here, just a couple of benefits that we wanted to highlight about ABLE. We're -- and we're going to go over these throughout the course of the presentation. It has multiple functions, you're going to be able to utilize an ABLE account for short-term spendings and long-term savings, and we'll go into some examples and Amanda and Dalton are going to help us do just that. The opportunities to be and -- have financial empowerment and community inclusion. We'll talk a little bit about the the opportunities -- the disability qualified expenses that are enumerated in the original ABLE act, but also how the funds and resources can be spent. We'll talk about the spin down alternative, which I'm sure is going to be something that is very important to individuals in the audience today. We'll talk about the flexibility and the easy to utilize platform of ABLE. It's easy to open, it's easy to close, and it's easy to use, similar to a traditional bank account. And then finally, we'll talk about the tax benefits of an ABLE account and what that will look like to you individually based on where you live in the country, and how that will work on a annual and long-term planning basis. So Eric, I'm going to stop there and turn it back over to you.

>> Eric Ochmanek: Yeah. So the age of onset is the key number for who's eligible for an ABLE account. So currently under federal law, it's 26 and younger. So again, that's the age of onset of the disability. That does not mean a person has to be under the age of 26 to enroll in an account. Actually nationwide, the oldest person that has an ABLE account is in their 90s, so again the onset of disability has to occur before the age of 26. With Sara's leadership and some of the other advocates when they built out the ABLE act, they even noted an opportunity for people with disabilities who have been diagnosed with a disability after the age 26. So let's say you were diagnosed with a condition in your 30s and 40s, that maybe you had since birth, or maybe occurred before the age of 26. You also could be eligible for an ABLE account. So again please, one takeaway from today -- it's the age of onset of the disability or the diagnosis of the disability before the age 26. The disability must last for at least 12 months. You can actually have an ABLE account and have a short-term disability, maybe then be diagnosed with not having a disability then, and then you can actually come back to having an ABLE account if your disability does come back. So there are different ways of having an ABLE account that could be stopped and started. One of the other key criterias for having an ABLE account is that you could be eligible for SSI or SSDI, or you have a doctor's diagnosis of a disability, again either physical or mental. We point people to the examples in the Social Security Blue Book. So there's a Blue Book for both adults and for children, so please visit Social Security Administration's Blue Book for all the various examples of conditions and diagnosis for having a disability. One of the key other notes on this page, real quick, was the fact that you don't have to actually be on any benefits to have an ABLE account -- just want to note that for everyone. Then Sara, on the next slide, while you were talking I was typing you and Mark different emails. Actually Erica was asking a couple questions about having to find out how she can get information on the California ABLE account. So this page was great. So for Erica again, I mentioned it in the chat when I answered your question, but if you go to the ABLE today website and go to the ABLE-programs page, it's a full listing of all the state programs. Currently, again, there's 46 states that offer the program and also the District of Columbia. So please visit there. There's great information about the programs, the enrollment website, the marketing websites. Most of the programs can enroll from anywhere. Maine is an example that they offer bank -- in-person banking enrollment. Most of them are done, though, online. You can actually be in a state, and if you want to join another program you could do that. We always recommend looking at your own state's program though, because there could be advantages such as tax advantages, or maybe Medicaid estate recovery advantages that your state could have, so please do go on your state's profile first, before considering other programs. Next slide? Recently and throughout this year, all the ABLE programs are updating who can actually help set up and administrate an ABLE account. So first and foremost, the person with disability can open up, enroll, and manage your own ABLE account. 100 percent a person with a disability can do that. There are other people who can be an ABLE account support person to help them manage the account. And again, this is the criteria and the new order for that. So again it's power of attorney, a conservator, guardian, the spouse, a parent, a sibling, a parent -- grandparent, and then a representative payee. So again, that's the order right now that the federal code says who can help administrate and help be an ABLE account support person. Next slide?

>> Mark Raymond Jr.: So let's go back to our example of Amanda, the 13 year old with a physical disability. Her parents are trying to save for her to go to college. So in this situation, Amanda's mom is going to serve as her support person. Amanda's mom is going to open the account for her online. And as -- Amanda's mom is going to serve as the administrator. Now the account is owned by Amanda, but her mom just makes all the deposits, and monitors it, and make sure that all of the day-to-day operations of her account is taken care of, including the contributions and withdrawals. We'll talk about our friend Dalton in a minute.

>> Sara Hart Weir: Eric, do you want to jump back in on this slide?

>> Eric Ochmanek: Sure, yeah. So the ABLE account business administration comes with several different variables, and a couple different things or options for people to have. So number one, it's like a general banking account. You can deposit money electronically into it, or you can write a check into the ABLE program, so it makes it very easy to deposit. Most of the programs also come with great features such as payroll deduction, so a person with a disability or a family member of a person with a disability can actually payroll deduct money out of their salaries and income directly into an ABLE account. Most of them also come with e-gifting features, so if a person with a disability wanted to say that "I'm graduating from high school, I'm graduating from college, would you be interested in providing money into my ABLE account?" Or if co-workers want to do something, a family member wants to do something, they have great e-gifting campaigns that can be started for a person with a disability that has an ABLE account. Kind of think of it like a Kickstarter or a GoFundMe account, but it's actually created just for ABLE accounts. And then -- an option that was put in place for ABLE account is monies that are in a 529 college savings account can actually be rolled over from a 529 college savings account, and then help expand the -- the way and the usage of that money, and be rolled over for free of charge into any ABLE program. For the amounts -- so currently -- and this has gone up over the years. For Sara and I, we've been working on this outreach now for several years, the annual number actually was in the 14,000 originally, but as of this year the new annual amount -- so that's from any source for a contribution is $16,000. What that means is a person with a disability can put their own money in, a family member, friends, organizations, non-profits, even their employers -- anyone can contribute up to sixteen thousand dollars a year into someone's ABLE account. Additionally though, through the ABLE to work act which was -- added on in 2017, Congress allowed for an additional up to $12,880. Now this money has to come from the amount of money someone earns in income, so basically if the person with a disability is working, they can put an additional twelve thousand dollars into their ABLE account. So I always go back to the fact that these are a lot of numbers, but the real main number anyone ever has to remember is at any one time through SSI and Medicaid, the asset limit always was two thousand dollars. At any one time, someone could only have two thousand dollars. And now through an ABLE account you can theoretically put in up to $28,880 every single year, year over year. So it's a great option for people to have, it's a great option for people to consider in financial empowerment in their lives. And then the far right hand side -- most of the ABLE programs actually differ state by state on how much the actual full amount could be in the account. So roughly it's about 400 to 500,000 dollars is the maximum amount of money that can be in any one ABLE account across the country.

>> Mark Raymond Jr.: All right, going back to our 34 year old friend Dalton. Now Dalton has a job, right? And Dalton set up a direct deposit feature with his employer to contribute part of his check into his ABLE account. So what's that mean? That dalton can contribute up to that twelve thousand eight hundred and eighty dollar limit that Eric just mentioned. Now before, of course, he was limited by that two thousand dollars a month. This has expanded his opportunity to save money and build financial stability over his lifetime. Now with an ABLE account, he now saved up to $17,880.

>> Eric Ochmanek: Sorry, it's back to me -- sorry, I was typing an answer into somebody. Philip this has been -- I have to tell you Philip, one of the best parts about having an ABLE presentation is answering questions. Like I said earlier, I've been to every county in Ohio, and we could give the presentation, but the questions actually make it, so I really appreciate that people are asking questions. So I know it looks like I'm typing emails, but I am -- I am actually answering the questions.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: So I will say, quick shout out to audience members Erica Abbott and Stephanie Howard for keeping the conversation going, and now joined by Matt Gurlett. If you are an audience member and you have a question that we haven't answered yet about ABLE accounts, type it in the chat box, we'll have a chance to ask them at the end of the hour, but keep them coming and keep them going to Eric Mark or Sara.

>> Eric Ochmanek: And we know everybody's got a short amount of time, so we're multitasking the best we can. That's what I'm trying to do at all the same time. Okay, so for the ABLE accounts themselves, there are annual accounts costs that come with the ABLE program. So they're going to be different. I know everyone is -- it looks great that there's an ABLE account monthly fee that says zero dollars, but one of the first features I want to talk about on this page is all the ABLE programs have different features. Some have debit cards, some have checking accounts, right? Some have neither. So the fact that maybe one might cost more than another, you have to look at the features that are involved in each one. The one that's zero might not be in your state either. So that's why -- there's these ranges on these fees, so for example zero to sixty dollars a year for the fee, that's a monthly fee, and then the right hand side we talk about an asset-based fee. So think about that retirement monies or other monies that you might have in financial products do come with investment fees. The ABLE account investments also have the same thing. So really what this page is helping to describe is there's different levels of fees, both on the monthly maintenance costs, and also the asset base fees. But please just consider looking at the different programs and different products to see what fits best in your life. For the investment options themselves, one of the best parts about an ABLE account is there's such great flexibility in how to spend the money. So number one there's a -- it's a checking option, a savings option, and investment options. Like I said earlier, some of the programs actually have checking accounts where you can get a physical checkbook and actually go ahead and write checks out to spend the money. Some of them have debit cards, so you can just use debit cards, you know, at any time. All of them, though, have a savings account. So if you just want to put money into an ABLE account and just save it away -- for example for a down payment of a car, or maybe a down payment of a home, or maybe you just want to save money for a long term expense, you know, 5, 10, 15 years from now. You can use the money that way. On the investment side, many of the programs have multiple different investment options. So it's a -- it's a combination of stocks and bonds, obviously, and what happens is it rides the market like anything else. I do want to make sure we make everybody aware markets do go up and down. So for investments, the portfolio pieces on ABLE accounts come with higher risk, higher reward, and then lower risk, lower reward. At any time, though, you do not have to pick either option. You don't have to pick all your money into savings, and you don't have to pick all your money into investments. You can actually mix and match them. So if you want to put some money in savings, great. You want to put some of the money in investments, or again, if you want to put all in one or the other. Really, the flexibility of the ABLE accounts is people with disabilities and whoever helping them administrate the account can pick and choose how best to have the money in the account.

>> Mark Raymond Jr.: Now when we talk about the different options, like Eric just mentioned, on things that we can spend this money on specifically, the qualified disability expenses -- QDEs, right? It's anything that relates to the disability and helps maintain to improve health, independence, or quality of life for that person. For example, housing and rent, assistive technology, basic living expenses, right? Toothbrush, toothpaste. Then financial management, and the other side is transportation, health and wellness, doctor's appointments, right, education, going to college like we talked about for Amanda, and legal fees, right? We all have some legal issues at times. And then the way that you can withdraw these funds -- Sara, if you can go to the next slide -- different programs have various options, like Eric was mentioning. Some offer checkbooks, others might offer a checkbook and a debit card. Some you might go through third party checks or bank transfers. We want to advise everybody to learn as much about your state's particular program as you can, so you understand what your options are.

>> Sara Hart Weir: So we mentioned earlier in the presentation that we would highlight some of the special benefits rules regarding SSI and Medicaid. So there are two -- elements that we wanted to point out as it relates to ABLE accounts. So the first one is regarding SSI, and I often refer to this as the SSI threshold in the ABLE account. So if the balance of your ABLE account reaches or goes over a hundred thousand dollars, that is when the SSI starts to count this as a resource. So if you withdraw money to use it for housing, you must spend it within the same calendar month. So let me step back and just kind of rephrase that if you will. Once the account -- your ABLE account -- reaches a hundred thousand dollars, you have the option to continue saving up till your state's limit, and Eric pointed that out. Or you have the option to go under that limit, that SSI limit. So your check is just suspended you don't become -- you don't opt out of the program as a whole. It's just that $100,000 threshold, and it is up to you and your individual financial situation to figure out if you are at a point where you're saving for, for instance a home, as Mark pointed out, and you need more than a hundred thousand dollars in that that account, or if you're out at a point in your life where you're utilizing your ABLE account for more short-term savings and expenses. So that's the SSI limitation. Now let me turn to Medicaid. If you receive Medicaid, your ABLE account balance is never impacted. You will continue to qualify for Medicaid and you never become ineligible. There is one caveat in the original statue -- of the ABLE act from 2014. The Medicaid recovery payback still applies to ABLE, just as it applies to other bank accounts, and you can check with your state to confirm. If we haven't done so already, we will put a link to our state ABLE page so you can check out more specifics based on the state or plan that you may be interested in accessing. And another point -- and we're going to probably get into this a little bit later but what if I already have or I'm considering a special needs trust? And our answer to that is pretty simple. Great - you can use both. And special needs trusts can accept larger annual deposits than the ABLE account and we kind of went into that on the slide Eric just presented. People and individuals with disabilities and families are frequently utilizing special needs trusts to put large deposits, and then you also have the flexibility to utilize a special needs trust and an ABLE account together. For others -- as an ABLE account can complement a trust, we wanted to point out just a couple of examples. ABLE accounts are less expensive -- and we went into some of the fees associated with ABLE accounts here just a few moments ago. They're often far less expensive to set up and maintain. We went through that process. You do not need to access any legal help to open up an ABLE account. You do not require an attorney's help to do that as well. We wanted to make sure that folks were aware of the flexibility of that option as well. ABLE accounts -- and Mark did a phenomenal job walking through some of the disability qualified expenses that can be included with your use -- use and flexibility of ABLE -- you can buy more things. There's a lot of flexibility with those disability qualified expenses to save for short-term or daily expenses, as well as long-term -- long-term expenses like a house, a mortgage, a down payment, an accessible vehicle. Eric pointed this out, but tax deductions -- there's a lot of states that are offering incentives, and we really encourage you to check out your home state's program and see what incentives may be included in that overall plan. Ownership -- this was really important when we started working on this in 2006. The account can be established and administered and owned by the individual with a disability. The self-determination factor of ABLE is pretty phenomenal. And then finally, and I think this goes without saying, it gives individuals with disabilities a lot of flexibility and a lot of autonomy to save and spend their own money the way they -- they prefer. I'm going to turn it back over to Eric.

>> Eric Ochmanek: Yep. Philip, great questions. I hope -- my hand going like this hasn't distracted everybody.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: No, you're doing great. And shout out to Nicole Nair and Matt for getting their questions in, and shout out to Eric for getting them answered.

>> Eric Ochmanek: [laughs] There's a couple answers I did that were quick but hopefully I'll have a chance to elaborate here a little bit more. So number one -- next step -- this is a lot of information. I know that. Sara and I know that. Mark -- ABLE account, if it's a brand new thing for you, it's great. We're really happy you've learned about this. Obviously you're gonna have more questions. So number one: please research more on ABLE accounts. Go to our website, The National Association of State Treasurers houses this repository for ABLE programs. There's Federal information on our website. It has all the Federal benefit listings, so for example, all the regulations from Social Security on how they treat ABLE accounts is on our website. How Medicaid treats ABLE accounts is on our website. HUD, USDA, it's on our website, including the ABLE act law. Please go there, please research it yourself. Look about how other programs do different things so -- the reason why number one it says research because we want you, now that we've given the information, introduced you to ABLE accounts, please do your own research on what fits best into your life. Number two, for us: helping spread the word. So Sara and I've probably done this presentation and talked about ABLE accounts now many many times. I actually really enjoy the fact when people say they have never heard about ABLE accounts. It really -- for us it means that there's much more work that can be done. There's much more work that we need to do in educating people with disabilities and the disability community on why ABLE accounts can benefit their life. It's finding new partners and partnering with people like Philip on helping to share information. So for us, if you know somebody in your community, if you know a friend, a co-worker, anybody at all, please just let them know what the term ABLE account is, and we'd be happy to obviously share information with them. And then the third one which I hope we can get to more in a little bit is please request a presentation. You know, answering questions like this and doing the presentation and introducing ABLE is a great first step in outreach. I've done a presentation in every single county in Ohio I think. It's just great to share information the way it's supposed to be. Imagine a world where people with disabilities don't have to go somewhere for information, that people can give you information, and give the community information back to you so you can make that decision. So for us it's all about helping you research, help us then spread the word, and then ask us how we can help other people. I mentioned the federal benefits website, so on our website abletoday.org, all the different federal benefits are listed -- that's the second option. We have our presentation -- this one right here -- on there. There's information about ABLE accounts and employers. Obviously you mentioned earlier on the fact that the ABLE-programs page is a listing for every single ABLE program in the country. It's their enrollment page but also their marketing page, because you might want to go to one or the other to learn about the program. So please go to either one of those for information. And then obviously, thank you. I mean the National Association of State Treasurers, we helped found this and fund this through Wells Fargo. It means a lot. The National Association of State Treasurers is the only place where all the different ABLE programs actually get together, which is why it's housed where it is. And that's why Sara, Mark, and I are very pleased to be able to work for NAST and do these educational outreach opportunities. So with that -- Philip, there's a couple questions back in the chat. I'm happy to just go back through and make sure we answer them fully, or if anybody has questions happy to do it.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Well I'll dive right in because I've got my questions that I'm burning to ask, but I threw this up into Mark Eric and Sara from Rachel Pierce, "do contributions to our funds in ABLE accounts impact qualification for HUD-subsidized housing?"

>> Eric Ochmanek: Yeah -- Sarah, Mark, if it's okay, since I'm on a roll I might as well just keep going right, because -- it's hard --

>> Sara Hart Weir: Keep going, Eric.

>> Eric Ochmanek: Okay so for -- so there's two parts to this question. So number one: ABLE money -- and again if you go to our website in the federal benefits page -- the ABLE money in the account does not affect HUD benefits at all. Not one bit. Money in the account -- in fact the HUD administration actually provided us a resource document showing how ABLE accounts are to be treated by HUD benefit supervisors, so it's on our website, it's definitely there. The second piece of this though, missing a little bit about all of us sharing information with each other, is the fact that if you -- do earn income, that income can still affect your HUD benefits. So I just want to make sure I clear that up. ABLE money does not affect HUD benefits, but if you are working just keep in mind, if you do work and you work more because you can save more in ABLE account, that income that you put in could affect your HUD benefits. Again it's not ABLE related, but we want to just give you information on your HUD benefits.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Outstanding, thank you very much for that very very direct and clear answer. I mean, and I think that speaks -- Rachel's question really speaks to why this is so important, why financial security is the bedrock on which you can address housing and can address access to the workforce, you can access -- family planning. It's all so important. So you know, that all being said, we've gotta -- you've done a great job in your presentation, everybody, talking about kind of where things stand with the states with the different programs, how ABLE came to be, how it's structured, how people can access it through the different state programs. Great shout out to the National Association of State Treasurers for their supporting this work. But I'm really curious, what is the overall national kind of landscape around ABLE and the ABLE act, and where are there opportunities for the disability community writ large to advocate further expansion and further financial security as a community?

>> Sara Hart Weir: Great question Philip. I'll jump in here for our team and take that one, and then I'm gonna pivot and ask Mark to join in momentarily. So you know, the great thing about ABLE is in 2014, when we got this legislation across the finish line, I'll say this because -- and Eric is probably sick of hearing me saying this -- but we did something monumental as it relates to disability advocacy. We passed probably the most significant piece of bipartisan legislation since the ADA and you know, obviously we're getting ready to celebrate 32 years of ADA next week. And when we did that we changed the tax code to create an incentive and a tool for people with disabilities to save. We got 85 percent of the entire Congress to support this bill: Bernie Sanders to Jim Jordan, and everyone in between. And then what we did is we've looked for opportunities to build upon the foundation. So we eliminated the state residency requirement shortly after its passage. Eric talked about the ability to save your own paycheck through the ABLE to work function. That was passed in 2017, alongside the ability to roll over that account. If somebody happens to have a 529 and they get that diagnosis of disability a little bit later in life, you now have the flexibility without a penalty to roll that bill -- to roll that account into an ABLE account. And then finally, we're really excited about the momentum behind increasing the age. So Eric talked about the onset of the disability occurring before age 26. There is a lot of momentum and effort, especially on the Senate side right now, to advance the age limitation for people with disabilities, and increase that from age 26 to 46. And we want to give and commend Senator Casey for helping us do that. So a lot of momentum, I know with ABLE today and our work through the National Association of State Treasurers, we're looking for every opportunity to improve upon this foundation. And I thought Mark may jump in and talk a little bit about his eligibility status and work and focus from our ABLE today team.

>> Mark Raymond Jr.: Absolutely. You know, I'm one of those people that Eric was talking about that did not know what ABLE was a month ago. And as I learned about it, I learned that I wouldn't have been eligible for an account anyway because my accident happened when I was 27. And immediately, we started having conversations about what it would take to advocate to expand that age limit, and we learned about Senator Casey's work on the Senate side doing that, what, a week ago? So just know that we've been really intentional about the thought process on what needs to happen for the future. I even would say more people intersect with disability after the age of 46, so you know, the work is going to continue. We understand this isn't a perfect program, but it's way better than what we had.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely and I was going to say -- I've been -- I'll certainly say I've been a swamp creature in Washington D.C. for 12 years now, and -- one success builds on another, and the fact -- what we -- what you all accomplished with ABLE, what you are accomplishing with ABLE is going to make the next generation of kind of legislative impact and financial security for people with disabilities possible. May take a little time, may take a little effort. And so that's -- I'm really curious -- what are some of the biggest remaining misconceptions about ABLE accounts and where can people find the most clearest, most reliable information to guide them through their journey?

>> Eric Ochmanek: Sorry, I think that one's me, right?

>> Sara Hart Weir: Yes I think Eric, why don't you jump in there

>> Eric Ochmanek: So number one -- one of the things that always comes up in questions and misconceptions on ABLE account is the fact that if someone's over the age of 26 they can't have an ABLE account. That is not true. It is the onset of the disability before the age of 26. And again, the flexibility that was put into the act even states that if a diagnosis happens after the age of 26 they can still be eligible for an. ABLE account, so that's a big misconception. The other one is this: if you're not on any benefits -- so for example if someone says well I'm not on SSI, I'm not on SSDI, I'm not on Medicare, I'm not on Hyde benefits, I'm not eligible for an ABLE account. That is simply not true. When in fact anyone in the country has financial options to help them with their futures. So whether that's a retirement account, whether it's a Roth IRA, whether its any kind of investment option -- all these options help with their financial choices for the future. It should be no different for a person with a disability. If they're planning for their future, if they're saving for their future, if a person with a disability has family members that is interested to answer a question, what's going to happen to my son or daughter when I pass away, right, an ABLE account can help them do that down the road. But again, you don't have to be on any benefits at all to have an ABLE account. And then for us, Philip, our website has some great information on this. We really try to be a repository for information for all the programs. But again, once people go into the the actual ABLE program pages themselves, a lot of the information sits and lives and breathes in the ABLE program pages.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Got it, thank you. So Leah Wheeler has a really interesting question. So say somebody isn't on public benefits. Is there an advantage to using an ABLE account over a normal savings account?

>> Eric Ochmanek: Yeah that's a -- that's a great question. Number one, the advantages could be there's a tax advantage, so number one -- the state of Wisconsin, I'll just give an example. The state of Wisconsin actually have a ten thousand dollar tax incentive to contribute to an ABLE program. So if you're investing and you're putting in an ABLE program, you live in Wisconsin and your a tax filer there, you can receive up to a ten thousand dollar tax deduction for the ABLE account contribution. So there's -- tax incentives to having an ABLE account, right? Number two though -- and I go back to the question I asked answered previously -- is it's planning for the future, right? So you may not be on any benefits right now, right, you might not even need a savings account right now for reasons. But in 20-30 years if you're on a benefit, the month you start your benefits, you are up to that two thousand dollar asset limit. So you will not be able to have more than two thousand dollars if you ever go on Medicaid or HUD or SSI. So again, the ABLE account comes into -- it's an option for a person with a disability to plan for their future on what would happen to them possibly in the future.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: All right, great answer and great question. Going back to my own notes here. And I was gonna say so, you know, beyond -- the self advocates with disabilities, beyond folks themselves, I'm really curious -- what would be your biggest message to family members of people with disabilities about -- how to make the most out of ABLE, what they need to do, and how they can help their other friends and family with disabilities access these important accounts?

>> Eric Ochmanek: Sara, I've been blabbing long enough, you wanna -- or Mark, you wanna come in?

>> Sara Hart Weir: Mark, why don't you jump in?

>> Mark Raymond Jr.: I was passing it to you, Sara.

>> Sara Hart Weir: You were on mute. I think -- Philip, that's a really great question. It comes down to -- and this really was the heart of ABLE when we started working on it years ago -- it's really about self-determination, and it's really about giving individuals the option to plan for their own financial future. So we really encourage folks to look at ABLE through the lens of their own individual situation, you know, where they are in their lifespan, the other tools in the toolbox. We touched on special needs trusts, there -- there are a lot of options, or more options than ever before, I should say, for people with disabilities. Whether you're working, whether you're going to maybe not need benefits today, like Leah's great question, or you may need them for the future, we really encourage folks to sit down and look at their individual situation. And then the other -- element to that question is we encourage and we want to empower people to go out and do their own research. Eric touched on that toward the end of our presentation. It's really the goal of ABLE today. The reality is we have 120,000 individuals with disabilities accessing ABLE accounts. There are eight million people eligible for ABLE accounts today. And so this is really what we want to do through our ABLE today work and the collaboration and work with organizations like RespectAbility, and that's meet people where they are, and empower them to have the information at their fingertips to make their own financial decisions.

>> Mark Raymond Jr.: And I'll piggyback and add we all know that there are just so many barriers that exist for people with disabilities, and a part of our work is helping them to tear down the barriers that -- that they're faced with, and typically most of them are financial.

>> Eric Ochmanek: So Philip, there's a question on here that I want to make sure I give more information on. So Stephanie asked a question about giving information to employers. So two things: on our website we have a whole page and actually Sara leads our national initiative to talk to employers, so on our website, it's the employer tab. It's information for employees, but also information for employers. So please go there, there's a great video, we talk about what it means and also just explaining to companies how it can be helpful. Sara additionally, though, and with Mark too, if you have an HR department or a diversity inclusion network, a disability network at your company, we would love to talk to them and explain what ABLE accounts are, and if they're in an HR department that's interested in even learning about what an ABLE account is, please let us know and reach out, because we're more than happy -- I don't want to make it sound like we don't have enough work, but we do, Philip, but we know that every single one of these conversations helps in so many ways. If we talk to one company and they might have a disability network of 15 people, that's 15 people we can introduce what an ABLE account is, right? It's 15 people that we can talk about financial empowerment to. So for us, if you have an HR department, a disability network that would be interested in hearing about ABLE accounts, please reach out and let us know.

>> Sara Hart Weir: And I dropped my my email in the chat there, Eric's absolutely right. Not only are we providing this outreach and these educational opportunities to our partners in the disability community, we really want to jump in and provide the train the trainer model to employers. So if we can work with your HR department, our hope is that they're not just employing one individual with a disability, that your experience and your advocacy within your workplace could benefit a lot more individuals with disabilities.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Excellent. All right. Well I think that was definitely an answer worth shouting out to everybody in our audience here today. So thank you everyone. So -- I'm going to exercise the moderator's privilege and ask Mark, Eric, and Sara a closing question. And my closing question is what about your work today and tomorrow makes you most excited and hopeful for the people with disabilities that we are -- that we all serve and we are all part of?

>> Eric Ochmanek: You want us to go oldest to youngest, or who's farther away from you or what?

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Let's go Mark, Eric, and then Sara.

>> Mark Raymond Jr.: So for me, a lot of the work that I do is in innovation and technology. And seeing where -- how many -- like there used to be two medical breakthroughs a year, and now it's like two a week, right? There's so much research going on around stem cells or robotic technology, new prosthetics. I think we're at an inflection point where we're gonna see change take an exponential growth around the world, quite frankly. And people are really paying attention to the aging and disability conversation. It's -- a lot of people ask me why I'm so positive and really it's because of that. I think there's such an impetus on people, and real change, so I'm just -- I'm always excited about the work that I get to wake up and do every day, and now working with Eric and Sara, and spreading, you know, the financial literacy tools and education, it just -- it's inspiring me, if I can be inspired.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Oh absolutely.

>> Eric Ochmanek: I'll do one quick background story and then one answer in part two. So when I first read the ABLE act in 2015 I immediately asked to be responsible and be part of the portfolio. I immediately saw that, you know, in this time of tension between political parties and political leaders, you know, if you point to one piece of federal legislation, one piece of public policy, the ABLE act -- it does exactly what the government's supposed to do, right? It actually helps people. And that's -- it's hard to say sometimes especially with things in Washington, D.C., but the ABLE act to me, I first read it and I first started talking about it -- and how I'm going to answer the question and it's -- there was a time where I was in Cincinnati, and I was at a kitchen table talking to a mother and a father and I was supposed to be talking to their son too who worked at Kroger. And he was late, so the mother and father and I -- we were chatting originally. He got back about 45 minutes late and I said hey, you know, how was work today, you know, did you work extra? And this young man, he said that he was late because of the bus. So his parents went on to describe that he works at Kroger, and every single day he goes to and from work on a bus, because he can't afford any money because of the fact that he has a $2,000 limit. So as I was describing what an ABLE account is, I also let them know that if he wanted to, he could use his ABLE funds for transportation, so he could use an option other than a bus to get to and from work. And in that moment -- just that one tiny thing -- one option for that family, that one person -- changed the entire direction of how that young man could live, right? He could now take an Uber or a Lyft or a taxi or some other option to and from work, to be independent, to still go to his work, and for them it was a matter of -- days that it was snowing or days the bus was late or the bad weather, whatever the case is. And I think for me the the beauty and also the inspiring part of ABLE and sharing information, is every single person with disabilities is going to have a way it's going to affect them. It's not just going to be for transportation, it might be for a down payment of a home, or maybe taking a new job. And I think the hope and the possibility of everything ABLE does -- I can't think of anything that'd be better to work on. And I only hope that we can go from 120,000 people enrolled to a million people enrolled here pretty soon.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: I like it, it's a nice solid tangible number. Let's shoot for a million at least.

>> Eric Ochmanek: By next month.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: [laughs] Absolutely. All right closing word from our panel today, Sara, take it away.

>> Sara Hart Weir: Well and you know, I think it comes down, you know, to this simple expression. If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together. And that mentality helped us get ABLE across the finish line and subsequently a lot of improvements to the overall legislation. Just like Eric's kitchen table -- example in Ohio, ABLE was an idea born out of a kitchen table conversation by five parents who happened to have children at the time who are now adults, because it was a long long time ago, with Down syndrome. And one of those parents and one of those advocates around that kitchen table, Steve Beck, who the legislation is named after, was our former Vice Chair at NDSS. He was a dad. He had no -- Philip, swamp creature experience. He just felt that he wanted -- he knew it was the right thing to do, that he should be able to save for his daughter Natalie, who happened to have Down syndrome, like his other daughter Mary Rose, and that, I think, passion helped get this done. And we know to take Eric's another great example and goal of one million accounts here in the next month, we're going to have to work on it together. And so we just appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with RespectAbility. This is why ABLE today exists, and we look forward to more opportunities to partner with Philip and Eric and the entire team going forward.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: All right well thank you everyone. Thank you Mark, thank you Eric, thank you Sara, I think it's a really powerful message to end this on. For all of our audience members a accessible version of the powerpoint and a captioned recording of this presentation today will be posted to RespectAbility's website very soon. The ABLE website you want to check out is abletoday.org. ABLE to save, ABLE to work, ABLE to live, and ABLE to achieve. Let's go out there, spread the word, let's get people signed up for accounts, let's keep people thinking about financial security. And I think -- even now in -- times of economic uncertainty, now is the time to really dig in and think about -- saving for the future and making life better for all people with disabilities. So we can't do that unless we do it together, just like Sara said, just like Eric said, and like Mark shared. Thank you everyone, this concludes today's webinar. Let's keep it up, keep at it, and get to work. Bye everybody. [Crosstalk, thank you's]