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US Labor Department extends comment period on proposed rule to improve employment opportunities for workers with disabilities *Interested parties may submit comments through Feb. 21*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs has announced a 14-day extension of the comment period for its proposed rule to revise regulations implementing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which obligates most federal contractors and subcontractors to ensure equal employment opportunity for qualified workers with disabilities.

On Dec. 9, 2011, OFCCP published a notice of proposed rulemaking in 76 Federal Register 77056 with a comment period originally set to end on Feb. 7, 2012. After reviewing requests for an extension, OFCCP has extended the comment period by 14 days until Tuesday, Feb. 21. This action will provide additional time for interested parties to analyze the issues raised in the proposal and to provide their comments. Individuals and organizations who already have submitted comments may use the extension period to revise or add to their original comments.

To learn more about the proposed rule and submit comments, visit <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/503>.

The rule proposed by OFCCP would strengthen the affirmative action and reporting obligations of federal contractors by requiring them to set a hiring goal of having 7 percent of their employees be qualified workers with disabilities. The proposed changes also detail mandatory actions contractors would have to take in the areas of recruitment, training, record-keeping and dissemination of affirmative action policies – obligations similar to those that have long been required to promote workplace equality for women and minorities. In addition, the rule would clarify OFCCP’s expectations of contractors by providing specific guidance on how to comply with the law.

In addition to Section 503, OFCCP enforces Executive Order 11246 and the Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974. As amended, these three laws require those who do business with the federal government, both contractors and subcontractors, to follow the fair and reasonable standard that they take affirmative action and not discriminate in employment on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, national origin, disability or status as a protected veteran. For general information, call OFCCP’s toll-free helpline at 800-397-6251 or visit its website at <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/>.

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