



For people with intellectual  
and developmental disabilities



# POSITION STATEMENT

## Opportunities for Financial Asset Building

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities<sup>1</sup> must have opportunities to advance their economic and personal freedom by earning and saving money to enhance their physical, social, emotional, and financial well-being.

### Issue

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities are poorer than people without these challenges. Government policies put people at risk of losing critical supports such as Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, and Social Security benefits if they earn or save very modest sums of money. While some savings are allowed through trusts which meet SSI and Medicaid rules, these plans do not address the needs of everyone. Thus people with disabilities cannot plan and save for future needs like everyone else. Many government requirements conflict with goals for increased independence, productivity, and self-determination for persons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

### Position

Individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families should have opportunities to save money to maintain or improve their basic economic and social status including employment, housing, and retirement.

These opportunities should include such policy reforms as:

- Tax incentives, including Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, medical expenses, and business tax incentives;
- Individual Development Accounts that would enable a person to save for education, home ownership, or one's own business and/or employment;
- Expansion of housing assistance through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Housing Choice Voucher program so people can secure housing while retaining reasonable

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portions of their income for other expenses and investments;

- Access to low-cost, user-friendly approaches for acquiring, maintaining, and expending resources while remaining eligible for publicly financed services and benefits; and
- Tax rates for wealth accumulation by people with disabilities which are not excessive.

Policy reforms must allow people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities to have opportunities to earn money and invest in their futures without risking the health care, benefits, and support services on which they depend. Public policy should encourage rather than inhibit planning for future independence, productivity, and self-determination.

On a personal level, people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families should have opportunities to learn how to manage their money and spend it wisely through such means as:

- Transition curricula in high schools and other educational settings;
- Inclusive adult and higher education and consultation/coaching in communities;

- Knowledge of and access to free information in user-friendly print and electronic formats; and
- Training for human services support and professional staff, advocates, bank/credit union and investment personnel, government officials (from service coordinators to IRS staff) in how best to help people enhance their assets.

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<sup>1</sup>“People with intellectual disabilities and/or developmental disabilities” refers to those defined by the AAIDD classification and DSM IV. In everyday language they are frequently referred to as people with cognitive, intellectual and/or developmental disabilities although the professional and legal definitions of those terms both include others and exclude some defined by DSM IV.

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