BEYOND BENEFITS STUDY
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is [NAME] [if have someone else there, introduce them as well]. [I/we] work for Westat, a research organization based in Rockville Maryland. The Social Security Administration, or SSA, has hired Westat to conduct the Beyond Benefits Study.

During the Beyond Benefits Study, researchers will collect information about the needs of adults across the country who used to get disability-related payments from SSA but stopped receiving those payments because SSA determined that their disability became less severe and so they no longer qualified for benefits (Exiters). We will use what we learn to identify services that may help people who stop getting disability-related payments and are thinking about going back to work or finding a better job. The study also gives SSA information that may improve the agency's disability-related programs and policies.

Today, we'd like to hear about the services provided to Exiters in your state, and the policy and financing context around programs in your state aimed at Exiters and others who need assistance finding employment due to impairment or disability.

We previously sent you an informed consent sheet, explaining your rights in participating in this study. Did you have any questions about that information? [ANSWER QUESTIONS]

I just want to remind you of some of the key points about your rights. This is a research study. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. Your answers will be used for research purposes only. You can stop the interview at any time without penalty. You can choose not to answer any question. If you get frustrated or anxious at any point, we can take a break, skip a section, or stop the interview. If you get upset during the interview, we can offer you a referral to crisis management services that you can use if you want. However, if you tell [me/us] that you are planning to hurt yourself or someone else, [I am/we are] required by the law to notify appropriate authorities.

At the end of the study, we will submit a report to SSA summarizing the needs of people who live with a disability. We may use quotes from you or others in our reports but no one's name will be linked to those quotes.

We have planned for this interview to last up to one hour.

Do you have any other questions? [ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS]

Finally, with your permission, I would like to record this interview to help [me/us] recall what was said. Are you okay with me recording? [PAUSE FOR RESPONSE]

[IF AGREES TO RECORDING]
I'd like to start the audio recording now. [TURN ON THE RECORDER.]
For purposes of the recording, I am going to ask you:
Are you willing to participate in the interview? Are you willing to have the interview recorded?
[PAUSE FOR RESPONSE.]

[IF DECLINES RECORDING]
All right, that's fine. Is it all right if I take notes?
[PAUSE FOR RESPONSE.]

OK let's begin.

A.   Background

To start with, I'd like to talk a little bit about the history of policy, programming, and funding for employment and other services for people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past.

1. Have there been changes over time in [STATE'S] policies related to providing employment supports and services to people currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
    a.   Probe: due to demographic change; economic change; political change; changes at the national level

2. Have there been changes over time in [STATE'S] policies related to providing other services to people currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
    a.   Probe: due to demographic change; economic change; political change; changes at the national level

3. Has funding changed over time for employment services for people currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
    a.   What is responsible for these changes?

4. Has funding changed over time for other services for people currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
    a.   What is responsible for these changes?

5. Has service programming changed over time for employment services for people currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
    a.   What is responsible for these changes?

6. Has service programming changed over time for other services for people currently on disability or have been on disability in the past? What is responsible for these changes?

7. What agencies in [STATE] are responsible for programming and policy related to Exiters?
    a.   Have other agencies been involved in the past? If so, what changed?
    b.   Has the level of cooperation between agencies in policies and programming for Exiters changed over time? Why or why not?

B.   Current programming, policy, and funding

Let's turn to policies, programming, and funding today for people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past.

8. What are some of the important policies, laws, and regulations in [STATE] that shape programs for getting people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past back into work?
    a.   What led to these policies, laws, regulations?
    b.   Were there any challenges or facilitators in developing and enacting these policies, laws, regulations?

9. What are the major sources of funding for programs to help people get back into work?
    a.   Probe: Federal funding; state funding; private-public partnerships; other

      b. Are any of these funding sources particularly aimed at people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?

      c. Were there any challenges or facilitators in obtaining funding for these programs?

10. What do you think are the biggest needs of people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past in this state?

      a. Probe: Education, job training, job search assistance, other support (housing, transportation, other)

11. What would you say are the most important programs in [STATE] today related to getting people back into work?

      a. For each program:

            i. What led to the creation of this program? Were there any challenges or facilitators in developing this program?

            ii. What agency handles this program?

            iii. What populations does this program serve?

            iv. What outcomes have you seen with this program? What about outcomes specifically for people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past ?

            v. What do you think makes this program successful?

      b. Do these programs work together? If so, how? If not, what keeps them from working together?

12. What has been [STATE's] experience with the Ticket to Work program?

      a. How, if at all, has Ticket to Work changed how different agencies and organizations work together?

      b. What aspects have worked well?

      c. What aspects would you like to change?

      d. Has this program been effective for people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?

13. Has [STATE] implemented a Partnership Plus program? Why or why not? [IF YES]:

      a. What has been your experience with implementing Partnership Plus?

      b. How do the VR agencies and employment networks interact in [STATE]?

      c. What impact has Partnership Plus had on employment outcomes? Other outcomes?

C. Challenges and facilitators

Let's talk about the successes and challenges in [STATE].

14. Thinking about education, retraining, job search assistance, and other types of services:

      a. In what areas do you think [STATE] has the biggest capacity?

            i. Probe: Types of areas, and also types of capacity: staffing, funding, etc.

            ii. Why do you think that is?

      b. In what areas do you think [STATE] has too little capacity?

            i. Probe: Types of areas, and also types of capacity: staffing, funding, etc.

            ii. Why do you think that is?

            iii. What could federal policy do to improve capacity?

15. What do you think have been [STATE's] biggest successes in helping Exiters?

      a. What led to these successes?
      b. Probe: Policy successes; program successes; funding successes
           i. What led to these successes?
      c. Are there ways for federal policy to help you build on these successes? Why or why not?

16. What are areas that you think [STATE] still needs to work on?
      a. What challenges has [STATE] faced in improving in this area?
      b. Probe: Policy challenges; program challenges; funding challenges
           i. What led to these challenges?
      c. Do you think that there are ways that federal policy could reduce these challenges? Why or why not?

17. What are some of the major challenges at the service provider level?
      a. Is there anything that the state can do to help service providers?
      b. Is there anything the federal government can do to help service providers?

D. Recommendations
Finally, I want to hear any recommendations that you have.

18. Are there any programs or policies in other states that you'd like to introduce in [STATE] related to policy, programming, and funding for employment and other services for people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
      a. What would you need to do in order to bring that program/policy here?

19. What new policies and regulations would you like to implement here that would aid people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
      a. What would need to happen in order to implement these policies/regulations?
      b. What changes at the federal level would make it easier to implement this policy/regulation?

20. What new programs would you like to implement here that would aid people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?
      a. What would need to happen in order to implement these programs?
      b. What changes at the federal level would aid implementation of new programs?
21. How would funding need to change in order to introduce these new programs?

22. Does [STATE] have any plans to change programs/policies or introduce new programs/policies to aid people who are currently on disability or have been on disability in the past?

23. What "ideal" policy changes would you like to see—if you could make any policy changes?

24. What "ideal" programs would you like to see—if you could introduce any programs?

25. What changes at the federal level would help you here in [STATE] to better serve Exiters?

Thank you for your time.