

5/1/2023

Written testimony of Danielle Mahoehney:

Chair Hoffman, Chair Noor, and Members of the Human Services Conference Committee,

Please accept my written testimony in support of the Governor's proposal to phase out subminimum wage included in the House's omnibus bill. My name is Danielle Mahoehney, and I am a community living and employment specialist at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration where I am the project lead for the Minnesota Transformation Initiative, or MTI. MTI is funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services to provide training and technical assistance to provider agencies across Minnesota that want to transition away from subminimum wages. We are currently supporting 8 grantees of various sizes from across the state that have committed to phasing out subminimum wages by April 2024.

The proposal does not force providers to change their services for people with disabilities. However, like the 8 grantees MTI is working with right now, many providers will choose to follow the direction the field is moving and make changes to their services. The idea of change is understandably scary to agency leadership and staff as well as to people with disabilities and their families. Organizational change is hard work, but it can be done with strong leadership, a clear vision, and external support when needed. We are seeing this right now. For instance, MTI is working with a small provider in a rural area that only offers center-based work, often below minimum wage. They are now training staff in evidence-based employment practices and are planning to begin offering services to help people find and keep competitive jobs in the community. They also plan to develop day support services for those who don't want to work or who work part-time. They plan to continue offering services to everyone they currently support.

The proposal to phase out subminimum wage includes technical assistance for providers to transition from subminimum wage. Employment providers in Minnesota and across the country have been transforming to services focused on competitive employment for decades. We have experience and research to inform what is essential to an effective and sustainable transformation. Organizational transformation, when it is intentional, often results in greater community inclusion and better quality of life for people with disabilities. Research supports this, and providers that have successfully made these transformations have stories demonstrating this.

Sincerely,

Danielle Mahoehney