

May 1, 2023

To: Human Services Conference Committee Members

RE: Subminimum Wage Provisions in House Omnibus

Marisa Bengston-Loerzel Written Testimony

Mr. Chair and Committee Members,

I am Marisa Bengtson-Loerzel. I am testifying in support of the provisions to phase out subminimum wage in the House omnibus bill.

I have 3 children and my hopes and dreams are the same for them all. I dream that my children will grow up happy and healthy. I dream they will grow into caring and loving adults. I dream they are able to pursue their career passions – whether that is to explore the world, become a doctor, or open a bakery.

But with so many hurdles in the way, my dreams are often replaced with worry and doubt for my daughter, Addie. Time and time again, people with disabilities like Addie, face barriers to achieving their dreams. While I had the choice of many colleges, we have **one** in Moorhead that **might** be able to accommodate her needs. While I was able to save up money, look at many houses, and purchase the one of my dreams, Addie will wait for residential “placement” in a group home. And while I was offered employment that comes with a competitive salary and generous benefits package, Addie may make a subminimum wage.

So instead of dreaming that Addie can find a job that values her worth as an employee, I find myself hoping that she can do well enough on a time-study to earn the highest wage possible. This isn't hyperbole. This is what subminimum wage jobs looks like.

Instead of dreaming of her little bakery in downtown Moorhead, I find myself hoping she is given more opportunities than scraping the gum off the bottom of tables. Instead of dreaming that Addie will have enough money to take a vacation or maybe even start a family, I find myself hoping that she does really well on her time study so she can make at least \$4 an hour...because that would actually be a really good subminimum wage. This way of thinking is soul crushing and heart breaking!

I am asking you to please phase out the subminimum wage – NOW! The subminimum wage for workers with disabilities is an old-fashioned and outdated way of viewing people with disabilities as helpless, needy, and unable to work. Do we really want to continue this way of thinking? Of course not! It is time to move forward! It is time to make this change and respect (and pay) people for what they are worth!

Thank you.

Marisa Bengston-Loerzel, Moorhead, MN