



MINNESOTA DISABILITY LAW CENTER
Duluth Fertile Mankato Minneapolis

May 1, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Minnesota Disability Law Center, a statewide division of Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid. The Minnesota Disability Law Center is the state's designated Protection and Advocacy System providing free civil legal services to Minnesotans with disabilities.

The Minnesota Disability Law Center strongly supports the Governor's proposal to phase out the subminimum wage included in the House's omnibus bill. Our organization has spent several years developing our position on this issue and our support for phasing out the subminimum wage is the result of years of research, consultation with organizations in other states, monitoring of subminimum wage employment sites, and engagement with clients and communities.

Last year, the Disability Law Center published a report on subminimum wage employment in Minnesota and our recommendations for phasing out the practice. I will briefly share some of our findings. In 2018, the state of Minnesota spent ten times more on subminimum wage employment than the state spent on supporting community employment for people with disabilities. Minnesota falls behind other states in the percentage of people served in community employment – 10 percentage points below the national average – unsurprising given the relative lack of investment.

Our research found that over 80% of subminimum wage providers in Minnesota offered only one type of work. If people are limited to one, maybe two types of work, how will they have an opportunity to explore their interests or develop their skills? To make an informed choice about employment, the state and service providers must meaningfully offer a variety of options and opportunities to all people with disabilities. Subminimum wage employment does not offer choice.

Today, 13 states have passed legislation ending subminimum wage employment. Minnesota is one of six states with currently pending legislation to phase out the practice. Bipartisan

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legislation introduced in Congress would eliminate subminimum wages nationwide. Subminimum wage employment is on its way out. In 2020, the United States Commission on Civil Rights published a detailed 349-page report recommending that Congress phase out the practice. The Commission found that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities earning subminimum wages are not categorically different in their disabilities and levels of support needs from those working in integrated employment.

Minnesota can learn from the states that have phased out subminimum wages over the last two decades, implement the carefully researched and thoughtfully planned recommendations specific to our state, and expand opportunity and choice for Minnesotans with disabilities by investing in person-centered, community-based, integrated employment services.

The Minnesota Disability Law Center asks the members of this Conference Committee to support the Governor's proposal included in the House's omnibus bill to advance the civil rights of Minnesotans with disabilities by phasing out the subminimum wage. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan Fleurant
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