

May 1, 2023

To: Human Services Conference Committee

RE: Subminimum Wage Provisions in House Omnibus

Dupree Edwards – Written Testimony – Subminimum Wage

My name is Dupree Edwards. I am testifying in support of the elimination of the subminimum wage. I live in Crystal, MN and have some mental health and cognitive disabilities. I grew up in the Twin Cities and moved to Arizona for a few years but have lived in Minnesota again since 1999. I live in licensed housing and receive the CADI waiver.

It took a lot of work to avoid being trapped in a subminimum wage job, because that is what I was offered after graduating from the Transition Plus program. However, I knew right away that I was capable of competitive employment. I knew that I might never have other opportunities if I took a “piece work” job at a DT&H. That was the name we used for subminimum wage.

After several agencies failed to find me employment, I was offered services with Workabilities, Inc. and they found me a job in the community in 2011. I was employed by a big salon with 40 stylists as someone who helped in the laundry with towels and other things needing to be washed, as well as janitorial work that needed to be completed. I was paid at least the minimum wage and appreciated that I got a real paycheck. I stayed until 2018.

Since 2018, I have worked for Lunds and Byerlys bagging groceries and taking them to people’s cars. I help to collect carts and do some cleaning work too. I have a second job at Upstream Arts as a teaching artist. I maintain my Medical Assistance through the MA-EPD program.

I believe that people with disabilities can work and should be offered support to work competitively. I was able to overcome that support not being offered to me because I believed in myself. I ask that you give other people the opportunity to find real jobs and not be stuck at subminimum wage.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify.

Dupree Edwards, Crystal MN