Hello Sean and Kevin,

I am writing this testimony to be posted for the Human Services Conference Committee.

I am writing to express my full support for the Governor's proposal in the House omnibus bill that phases-out the outdated and discriminatory practice of paying employees with disability less than minimum wage in Minnesota.

Ending subminimum wage is the right thing to do. The practice is rooted in historical assumptions that people with disabilities can't work and earn real wages. These beliefs devalue the contributions of people with disabilities and have been disproven over and over. As someone who spent ten years working within the disability services industry, including with an employment provider located in the Twin Cities, I have personally seen people with significant disabilities prove that they are just as capable of careers, earning real wages above the poverty line, as full contributing members of their communities.

The average person draws a large portion of their personal identity from their employment.  When I provided support to people with disabilities working in real jobs for real wages, I saw the personal pride that came from earning a paycheck just like everyone else, in people who had been told their entire lives that they 'couldn't work.'  In my work I knew people with significant disabilities who wrote resumes, went on interviews, completed on-the-job training, and retire from jobs as they got older.  Not only that, I saw individuals who had previously been isolated, segregated and discriminated against because of their disability, now make genuine, long-lasting connections in their communities, develop new skills, and start businesses.  Doesn't each person want to be connected to the community in which they live?

The truth of the matter is that all people can work and earn competitive wages. Earning a living wage, and access to economic opportunities is what people with disabilities want.  I know this to be a fact, because the individuals I worked alongside have told me as much.

Supporting these provisions is the right thing to do, it is also a practical matter. There is growing momentum nationwide to phase out subminimum wage federally. Minnesota - once a leader in employment for people with disabilities - has fallen behind. We need state investment, planning, and coordination to build capacity in our home and community-based services system to better support competitive employment. These provisions would support that transition while finally ending sub-minimum wage in Minnesota.

Thank you for your time, and for the hard work you do.

Sincerely,

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Laura M. Halling

Constituent, Dakota County

Committed Advocate and Ally