

**To: Minnesota House Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy Committee**

**Chairman Ecklund and members of the Committee:**

I would like to thank you for taking my testimony and allowing me to share my perspectives on this important issue with the Committee.

My name is Jim Sillery. My direct experience in this matter is personal. I am a parent of a young adult on the Autism spectrum, who is working at the Asplin Center in Plymouth MN. My personal perspective has been broadened through my volunteer work with organizations like Opportunity Partners, Reach for Resources and Special Olympics. Additionally, I currently serve as a member on DHS' Technology First Advisory Task Force whose mission is to advise the commissioner on how to increase the use of technology by people with disabilities as prescribed by the Olmstead Decision.

My son, Adam, has been happily employed at the Asplin Center for over 8 years. Asplin has been more than a place for Adam to work. In addition to its center-based employment program, Asplin provides adults with intellectual developmental disabilities with a broad range of programs that help to develop life skills. It also serves as a community for Adam and the other adults who go to Asplin, where friendships are made and experiences are shared. This is important for adults with developmental disabilities who often do not have social networks that we take for granted. All of this is made possible under the provisions of Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor & Standards Act.

During this period, I have seen Adam grow in confidence and self esteem. His ability to interact with others has increased significantly. As I think about this, perhaps it is not surprising. In researching the origins of Section 14(c), I find that it was originally intended to provide **opportunity** and **choice** to those with developmental disabilities. Clearly, it is desirable that every person with a disability have the option to work for competitive wages. In many cases, they do not enter adulthood prepared to do that. A center-based program, like the one at Asplin, provides the **opportunity** for training in the life skills necessary to work competitively, better preparing them to find employment. However, not all of these adults can succeed in a competitive environment. So, a center-based program gives them a **choice** to work in an environment where they feel safe, can work as part of a community and have staff support. This is also a cost effective option. Without the choice of a center-based program, many of these adults would need to stay at home, creating a financial and emotional burden on their families.

The 14(c) provisions provides Adam and many others with **choices** and **opportunities** to start employment and then steadily develop skills, self confidence and work ethic. If the restrictions of HF439 are no longer in place, these **choices** and **opportunities** will cease to exist. Business that contract out this work will seek other sources of labor, perhaps sending the work overseas where cheap labor is abundant. Adam's story represents a large community of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are

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thriving under the provisions of 14(c) and, because they cannot succeed in a competitive environment, **will lose their employment** if HF439 passes.

On behalf of my son Adam, I ask you to **reject HF439**. Not only will this bill reduce existing employment opportunities, it will provide no new **choices** and **opportunities** to replace them. I implore you to avoid fixing something that is not broken. **Commensurate wages using the 14(c) provisions continue to serve the needs of our community.**

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

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