

RE: Center-Based 14c Employment
SF 4399 Conference Committee

I am here to tell you about my son Joe's experience finding a minimum wage job in the community.

After Joe graduated from high school in 2017, Voc Rehab said Joe would be the perfect candidate for customized employment under Section 511 of WIOA. Here's what happened:

We attended every meeting set up for Joe.
We filled out every form we were asked to fill out.
We got Joe ready for every staff encounter.
We answered a million questions about our son.
We did our job.

The system failed us.

We had four different service providers.
We endured countless staff changes, requiring us to start over every single time on Joe's job search.
After 3 1/2 years of searching, Joe was working 1 hour a week at minimum wage.

One hour a week.

When I was notified of yet another agency/staff change in July of 2020, I asked for and received a waiver from Voc Rehab and St Louis County to allow Joe to start pre-vocational training at the East Range Day Achievement Center (ERDAC).

We waited out the pandemic restrictions, and Joe started at ERDAC. It is a key component of Joe's person-centered plan.

He works five days a week.

He has work that is meaningful to him.

He has staff (all members of the Steelworkers Union) who understand his intellectual disability.

He has transportation provided.

He has friends and a social network.

ERDAC operates a non-profit gift shop, and Joe decorates bird houses and makes braided rugs that are sold on campus.

If 14(c) employment is eliminated, Joe will have to go back to the very system that failed him. I have no confidence that another 30 hour/week job will be found that provides him with all of the intrinsic benefits he has working at ERDAC.

I am asking you as a parent, a guardian, an advocate, and a taxpayer to find a way to let center based employment under 14(c) continue in Minnesota.

Joe is depending on you to defend his right to CHOOSE where he works.

Thank you for your time.

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