

March 19, 2021

RE: HF 439/ SF 658

My name is Gina Schmittziel, I live in Centerville, Minnesota with my husband and three children. My middle child, Gunnar, is the sweetest most stubborn 4 year old. Gunnar loves dancing, drawing and throwing his shoes the farthest back he can get them in our minivan while I'm driving so I have to retrieve them when we get to our destination. Gunnar also happens to have Down syndrome.

My children are still young, but I am already thinking about the employment opportunities they will have in the future. I know they can all achieve their aspirations as long as they work hard, but the options may be smaller for Gunnar with the current Fair Labor Standards Act. "Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 allows employers to pay their employees with disabilities less than the minimum wage, known as subminimum wages. Phasing out subminimum wage will help pave the way for equality in the workplace for people with Down syndrome and other disabilities, many of whom work in settings that fail to prepare them for integrated employment in the mainstream economy. This will give people with disabilities access to work and training environments that will allow them to acquire meaningful skills and better employment opportunities." National Down Syndrome Society.

Employment for individuals who have an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD) are largely limited to certain types of jobs that society says they can do. We need to work on creating a community where these individuals can have on the job support in a career path of their choice. Instead of sticking them in a center to roll silverware and package together products in a segregated setting, we need to come alongside these individuals and support them in a meaningful work setting. This means a job that they enjoy, that matches their skillset, and makes them feel good about the work they are doing. This also means paying them a livable salary, not subminimum wage.

Inclusion starts very young. If an individual with a disability is included from an early age, they will not be considered an "other" and will be included in everyday activities from childcare, to school age, to working alongside their peers. Let's work on making solutions to support and include individuals with I/DD starting at birth and continue that into our workforce. I am requesting you to support HF 439/ SF 658. By phasing out the special wage certificates, this legislation will give people with disabilities access to the work and training environments that will allow them to acquire meaningful skills and better employment opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We hope you take action to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Gina Schmittziel
Parent advocate from Minnesota's 6th congressional district