

Dear Human Services Conference Committee Members,

By way of introduction, I’ve worked in Minnesota’s disability employment space for 50 years as an executive, senior manager, advocate, and organizational consultant in support of the advancement of equitable, competitive integrated employment of Minnesotans living with significant disabilities. Also, I’m presently providing technical assistance to six organizations in Minnesota working to transform their organizations to advance a “A Working Life” for the people they support. I’m speaking here about service outcomes that feature competitive integrated employment and connect people to other meaningful, inclusive community life engagements.

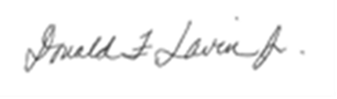
As a long-time student and observer in the disability employment space, I’ve heard it all. I refer to this in my consulting business as the “Axis of Inertia” and five enemies of transformational change. They are fear (and there are many), apathy, arrogance, skill deficits, and tokenism. There is an antidote to this Axis of Inertia and its actionable leadership. A willingness to advance the simple idea that Minnesotans with disabilities are our equals and they deserve to be treated equitably in the workforce. No other minority population would tolerate an antiquated law that enables work contributions to be paid below minimum wage. None!

Contemporary disability research is abundantly clear: people living with disabilities that choose to work, including those with complex, significant disabilities, **can** secure jobs in the competitive workforce when the right job is found, the right company is found, and access to the right supports are in place. Service providers in Minnesota, and throughout the country, have proven this to be true. It’s time to bring what we know to scale. For some, it will require customization of practices to find and engage the right employment conditions and delivery of supports.

Detractors of the legislative bill to eliminate payment of subminimum wages express concerns that if approved service providers will close their businesses or workers earning subminimum wages will be displaced. I’ve worked with hundreds of providers not only in Minnesota, but in other states and countries as well, and this is simply not true. Success is intentional and organizations that embrace transformational change do flourish. It means changing financial models and adopting better practices known to be more effective in producing competitive employment outcomes and business partnerships. Even rural based agencies have demonstrated success where organizational leadership is engaged.

I’m hopeful this Minnesota legislative session will make history by raising the bar and acknowledging that our residents living with disabilities deserve to be paid equitable wages…like everyone else. I respectfully request and encourage conference committee members to vote in favor of the bill that will eliminate payment of subminimum wages to Minnesotans with disabilities under DOL 14 (c ) certificates.

With warm regards,



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