

Michael J. Wall
5455 Timber Trail
Maple Plain, MN

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Chair Hoffman, Chair Noor, and Members of the Human Services Conference Committee:

As a parent and a sibling of adults with disabilities, I am writing to express my full support for the Governor's proposal in the House omnibus bill that phases-out the practice of paying employees with disabilities less than a minimum wage in Minnesota. Businesses should aspire to pay all their employees with a live-able wage that reflects their unique abilities, strengths and talents.

Ending sub-minimum wages will increase awareness and opportunities for people with disabilities who are qualified, ready and willing to work. Today, they are under-represented in our current workforce and held back by an unconscious bias and a lack of understanding of the value they bring to employers. My brother who had an intellectual disability worked for over 37 years for a national restaurant chain where he earned a minimum wage. He was respected and admired by his employer, co-workers and customers. My 23-year-old daughter who has Down Syndrome is currently working two jobs, one at a national grocery store chain and another at a local thrift store. Her employers pay an hourly rate in excess of Minnesota's minimum wage. Both employers have inclusive cultures that value her contributions and these companies draw customers, increase their workforce engagement and enhance their brand loyalty as a result of their inclusive hiring and fair wage practices. As an employee of a large, global company based in Minnesota, I have seen the success of a disability inclusion internship program. It is a win for the interns, many of whom go on to part- or full-time employment. It is a win for my company and it has led to significant employee engagement. Employees are proud to work for a company that values and hires people with disabilities.

Companies can hire more employees from this underutilized talent pool to support their mission and growth goals without relying on sub-minimum wage allowances. We need to help people with disabilities, business leaders and hiring managers to understand the steps on this journey to employment. This requires an investment in job training, social and communication skill development, user-friendly technology and accommodations to ensure success.

I understand that organizations that employ people with disabilities and rely on the sub-minimum wages for their business model will need support in transitioning to a competitive wage workforce. I also recognize this will require a phased approach with support from nonprofit organizations, local businesses and state development resources.

The time is now to end subminimum wage in Minnesota. We have the will and resources to give people with disabilities an opportunity to earn a living wage and the pride and dignity that comes from meaningful and fully compensated employment. Thank you for your leadership and support.

Sincerely,
Michael J. Wall

Michael J. Wall
wallman95@aol.com