

Dear Human Services Conference Committee Members,

I am a special education teacher working with students ages 18 to 21 in a transition program for ISD 917 in Dakota County. I have been in education for 22 years, while working as a certified public accountant and in sales for 10 years prior. The teachers and staff in our program teach students about job skills, employment, and life skills. We teach them about fairness, equity, and dignity.

The Minnesota Legislature has a historic opportunity to end the outdated, discriminatory practice of paying people with disabilities less than minimum wage. Please support the Governor's proposal included in the House Human Services Omnibus bill to increase wages and workforce participation for people with disabilities. This bill will phase out subminimum wages and strategically invest in providers to support the transition of their business models.

This proposal will treat people with disabilities in a fair and equitable manner while respecting their rights. Minnesota started this when decades ago we led the effort to provide people with disabilities meaningful opportunities to work in their communities. Now though, Minnesota lags behind. Despite being less populated than about half of the country, Minnesota has the most workers paid at subminimum wage per capita in the nation. Some subminimum wage workers in Minnesota earn as little as 7 cents per hour. This is not equitable and it provides no dignity to people with disabilities.

In our transition program we work to provide students with part-time and full-time employment in a job at an above minimum wage salary. We never think to provide a subminimum wage job as we know the students realize they are being paid less than non-disabled peers. We provide them with meaningful opportunities in citizenship. Our students with disabilities are treated with respect and dignity.

The idea of subminimum wage jobs for people with disabilities needs to stop. This practice does not align with Minnesota's values and this change is long overdue. Please end this civil rights violation and join me on the right side of disability rights history in ending this antiquated practice!

Sincerely,

Craig Mares
Hastings, MN