

May 1, 2023

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

I am writing to express my support for the Governor's proposal to phase out sub-minimum wage, as included in the House's omnibus bill (HF 2847). I would like to share my experiences and perspectives on the issue, stemming from my work with people with disabilities.

Throughout my adult life, I have worked alongside individuals with disabilities in various capacities. My journey began as an Employment Consultant at Kaposia, Inc. in Ramsey County, where I witnessed employees with disabilities being paid a fraction of what their neurotypical coworkers earned. This exploitative practice is both unfair and unethical.

As a licensed and certified interpreter with a degree in Sign Language Interpreting, I have been serving the Deaf community for over twenty years. Additionally, I own a small business in Dakota County that employs people with diverse neurological backgrounds.

On a personal note, I am the legal guardian and mother of a young adult named Adi, who is currently attending a transition program. Adi aspires to work as a receptionist at a doctor's office and deserves to be paid fairly for her work, just like anyone else. She has friends with varying degrees of disabilities, some with obvious signs and others with disabilities that can't be seen or detected, but they all have worth and should not be treated as second-class citizens.

By allowing employers to pay less than the minimum wage, we are sending a message that people with disabilities are worth less than others. Adi has several diagnoses, including Chromosome abnormality of Long arm of #13 resulting in intellectual disability, Epilepsy, ADHD, Anxiety, and Erb's Palsy. With her permission, I have included these diagnoses in this message. Unfortunately, her intellectual disability, which is the only one that could lead to an unfair wage, also makes it difficult for her to advocate for herself in situations like this.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs reconstructing." I urge you to join the commitment to fair employment practices in Minnesota by supporting the phase-out of sub-minimum wage.

Sincerely,

Audra Blades Goebel