



March 20, 2023

Dear Chair Hoffman and Senate Human Services Committee Members,

I am with the University of Vermont Center on Disability and Community Inclusion and I'm writing to support the provisions in SF 2934 to increase wages for people with disabilities by phasing out subminimum wage in Minnesota.

Vermont started community-based supported employment programs in 1980. Since the initial demonstration project, inclusive employment of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities has steadily increased. Sheltered workshops gradually closed as people found employment in the community or became involved in other community services. In 2002, Vermont closed its last sheltered workshop for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities becoming the first state with no sheltered work.

Vermont's current rate of employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is 47% compared to the national average of 20% (Vermont Developmental Disabilities Services State Fiscal Year 2018 Annual Report, ICI-UMass, Boston, 2018). The agency that housed the last sheltered workshop has an employment rate of 75%. The vast benefits of community employment for people with disabilities include increased income, a sense of contribution, skill acquisition, increased confidence, independence, identity, social connections, and the opportunity for people to develop meaningful careers.

Agencies with sheltered workshops did not close, they just transformed their segregated vocational services to community-based employment. In fact, agencies generally grow by increasing the services they provide. Individuals with high support needs were not left behind. Customized Employment including self-employment can assist individuals with high needs to gain employment if they choose to work.

The shift in philosophy and practice from facility-based to community-based employment services also shifts energy and resources. Since Vermont has no segregated employment, other opportunities are nurtured and supported including Project Search (3 locations), post-secondary education programs like Think College at the University of Vermont, College Steps at



3 state colleges, and SUCCEED, a post-secondary transitional living program as well as Peer-to-Peer Learning, a life-long teaching and learning program. People who would have been relegated to sheltered workshops are now students in these educational/vocational programs resulting in employment.

Students with ID/DD today are preparing for community life and employment, not segregated sheltered work. The sub-minimum wage model is outdated and not needed when there are so many other options available. Services have improved so much over the years with supported employment, customized employment, self-employment and expanding post-secondary education programs. When people with disabilities are in, and part of the community, the community is richer for it. Employers will hire and include people with disabilities at a competitive wage. When there are no sheltered workshops, it becomes the norm, the expectation is to be part of the community, including work.

Please contact me if you'd like more information at Bryan.Dague@uvm.edu

Sincerely,



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