



March 20, 2023

The Honorable John Hoffman
Chair, Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate
95 University Avenue W., Room 2111
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Jim Abeler
Ranking Minority Leader, Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate
95 University Avenue W., Room 2207
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Increasing Wages for People with Disabilities, Ending the Subminimum Wage

Dear Chair Hoffman, Senator Abeler, and Members of the Senate Human Services Committee:

I am writing in support of SF 2934 which includes provisions to ending the government sanctioned discriminatory practice of paying people with disabilities less than the minimum wage.

My 35-year career as a social work has been connected to some aspect of disability services, advocacy, support for self-advocacy, scholarship, and teaching. I am the lead author of Minnesota's [Comprehensive Plan for Prevention of Abuse and Neglect of People with Disabilities](#). I have spent 25 years doing work connected to sexual and other violence perpetrated against people with disabilities. People with disabilities experience violent victimization at [rates 3 to 4 times](#) higher than people without disabilities.

Ending the subminimum wage is a **safety** issue, but not for the reasons that some would lead you to believe.

Segregating people with disabilities in "special" or "sheltered" places has never, nor will ever, afford people labeled as "vulnerable" in our society safety and protection. Every day reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation are made documenting harms perpetrated against people with disabilities living and working in disability services settings. These "places" do not offer people with disabilities special protection from harm. [Factors](#) that contribute to higher rates of harm include systematic devaluation, segregation and isolation, a culture of compliance, and lack of power and control over one's own life.

We have been **systematically devaluing** people with disabilities through Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for over eight decades. Through this practice we have marginalized, oppressed, disrespected, impoverished, and thwarted the human potential of generations of Minnesotans with disabilities. These are the very same people we label as "vulnerable", while ignoring the fact that we, as a society, bear much of the responsibility for creating the conditions that lead to enhanced vulnerability.

[History](#) tells us that unless and until we demand better of our disability services system, we will largely get more of the same. Enacting the proposal to end the subminimum wage will send a powerful message about the value of people with disabilities in our state as Minnesotans, as workers and contributors, and as human beings.

Respectfully,

Nancy M. Fitzsimons (e-signature)

Nancy M. Fitzsimons, PhD, MSW, LISW (she/her/hers)

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