

March 20, 2023

To: Senate Human Services Committee
Re: SF 2934

Chair Hoffman and Committee Members,

We are writing in support of the important provisions in SF 2934 that phase out the outdated practice of paying people with disabilities subminimum wages in Minnesota. These changes would affirm the civil rights of people with disabilities and align our state's policies with our state's values. This will help advance equity, drive social change, and protect human rights.

Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, passed in 1938, allows people with disabilities to be paid less than the state or federal minimum wage. It is an archaic and discriminatory practice that contributes to the cycle of poverty and results in segregation of people with disabilities.

The provisions, based on the Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wages' recommendations, include a comprehensive package of investments and policy reforms. The provision includes technical assistance for providers to transition from subminimum wages. Employment providers in Minnesota and across the country have been transforming to services focused on competitive employment for decades. We have experience and research to inform what is essential to an effective and sustainable transformation. Organizational transformation, when it is intentional, often results in greater community inclusion and better quality of life for people with disabilities. Research supports this, and providers that have successfully made these transformations have stories demonstrating this.

All individuals with disabilities – no matter their support needs – deserve the opportunity to explore, find, and keep jobs and careers that provide personal fulfillment and help build wealth. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities should have supports from services, systems, and individuals to help them find and keep jobs based on their preferences, interests, and strengths.

It's time for Minnesota to look to the future and align our values of inclusion and opportunity into practice through our public policy.

Julie Bershadsky, Director of Community Living and Employment, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota

