

Date: March 12, 2024 at 11:59:48 AM CDT

Subject: Minimum wage

March 11, 2024

Dear Committee,

I am writing in support of the elimination of sub-minimum wage in Minnesota. As the parent of an adult child with significant disabilities, and a veteran vocational counselor with over 35 years of experience working with youth and adults around employment, I can understand both sides of the concerns around this issue. There is no justification for paying adults with disabilities less money per hour without admitting you think of them as inferior humans.

I have observed and engaged with many individuals who have been stuck in sheltered work settings for years. When given the chance to try work in the community, they performed well. Some individuals have been in sheltered work for 20 years, and have matured, gained skills over time, and no one notices the personal growth, until a family member or case manager suggests considering a job search. If a person is attending a Workshop, working should not be mandatory, it should be a choice.

One of the big problems with our system is very few people have been taught how to teach individuals with significant disabilities job tasks. Task Analysis is used in our Spec Ed system to teach new tasks to students. But that evidence-based practice is rarely used working with adults. Most job coaches have no specialized training. They just point, use voice commands, or show the person how to do the task. Unfortunately, the job coaches build themselves into the process, so when the coach steps away, the process falls apart and then we say the person cannot work

Many people who have significant disabilities may need more support to learn a job or stay on the job. However, choosing a job that is a good fit for the person with a disability can really reduce the impact their disability has on work speed, performance, and mood. Often, participants in a sheltered settings are stuck in jobs that are available, not good fits or aligned with skills, and then staff complain the person needs a lot of support to get tasks done, and they are grouchy and have a bad attitude. If I had to do a job I did not enjoy and was not good at, I would be grouchy, too.

In Minnesota, the minimum wage is \$8.85 for small employers and \$10.85 for large employers, neither is a huge amount. We need to stop timing people doing jobs that are probably not good fits for them, to determine their wage per hour. I once worked with a gentleman who had the use of one arm, and he was timed doing his Workshop job. He earned 18 cents an hour. A year later he was earning around 16.00 an hour working in a store using his computer skills.

No one should be paid less than minimum wage. Some Workshops have already been able to make the transition to paying participants a fair wage. It's not rocket science! We need to pay people with disabilities at least minimum wage, we need to train job coaches and other staff on evidence practices supporting individuals with significant disabilities in the workplace, and we need to be more person-centered.

Thank you for allowing me to give input.

Sincerely,

Abbie Wells-Herzog
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