

March 13, 2024

Re: Minnesota Coalition for Disability Wage Justice Letter of Support, SF 4399



Chair Hoffman and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota Coalition for Disability Wage Justice (MCDWJ), we write in support of Senate File 4399 – specifically the provision prohibiting issuance of 14(c) certificates which authorize payment of subminimum wage to people with disabilities. We need to ensure all people with disabilities are paid the minimum wage or higher in Minnesota.

MCDWJ is a statewide coalition of nearly 40 entities all working toward the same goal – wage equity for people with disabilities. We represent service providers, labor unions, advocacy organizations, higher education institutions, social workers, legal experts, and – most importantly – people with disabilities, their parents, family members, and other trusted supporters.

As you know, federal law allows businesses to pay people with disabilities less than minimum wage through Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. More than 3200 people with disabilities in Minnesota legally earn less than minimum wage, and our state – a purported leader in disability rights – employs more people with disabilities earning subminimum wage than any other state in the nation (per capita).

On average, Minnesotans with disabilities who work under 14(c) make just \$4.15 per hour, but some earn as little as 7 cents per hour.

Many people earning subminimum wage are in segregated settings. This contradicts the integration mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires that people with disabilities have access to the most integrated settings possible – including employment. Just last year, the United States Department of Justice found that employers who pay less than minimum wage in these segregated settings may be in violation of the ADA.

We urge the Minnesota Senate to support the prohibition of 14(c) certificates as outlined in SF 4399, which will help ensure that all workers with disabilities are paid minimum wage or higher by 2028.

This change is possible. The Minnesota Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wages created a robust transition plan that would make sure no one is left behind in the transition to ensuring Minnesotans with disabilities are paid minimum wage or higher. Just last year, the legislature funded that plan, making historic investments in individualized, integrated employment programming so all people with disabilities can earn minimum wage in jobs that build on their skills and interests.

Technical assistance, training and support is available for service providers, people with disabilities and their families to make this change. Service providers who have electively and successfully ended subminimum wage are available and are providing peer-to-peer mentoring so other providers remain viable. People who do not want to work will continue to have robust, enriching programming to support their needs during the day.

It is time for Minnesota to live up to our stated commitment to integration, inclusion, belonging, and justice for all Minnesotans. We call on the legislature to support wage equity for all Minnesotans with disabilities now.

Respectfully signed,

Members of the Minnesota Coalition for Disability Wage Justice

- Accord
- AFSCME Council 5
- Autism Society of Minnesota
- City of St. Paul
- Cow Tipping Press
- Dakota County Social Services
- Dungarvin
- Employee Ownership Network
- Epic Enterprise
- Great Work
- Griffin-Hammis Associates
- Hennepin County
- Howry Residential Services
- Inclusive Networking
- Integrated Living Options
- Kaposia
- Legal Services Advocacy Project
- Lifeworks
- Mains'l
- Medica
- Minnesota APSE
- Minnesota Association of Professional Employees
- Multicultural Autism Action Network
- Minnesota Council on Disability
- Minnesota Disability Law Center
- Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium
- National Association of Social Workers, Minnesota Chapter
- National Federation of the Blind, Minnesota
- Oak Tree Support Services
- Phoenix Residence
- Ramsey County
- Reach for Resources
- Residential Services, Inc.
- SEIU Healthcare Minnesota & Iowa
- Strengths at Work
- The Arc Minnesota
- Udac
- University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration