

Dear Chair Hoffman and Committee Members,

My name is Raquel Sidie-Wagner, and I'm writing today as both a former member of the Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wages and Disability Services Professional to speak to my resounding support of the provisions to phase out the use of subminimum wages in SF4399. It is of the utmost importance that we ensure that all Minnesotans with disabilities are being paid at a wage that's been determined by the work, not a diagnosis.

For the better part of the last decade I worked as a disability services provider managing a multitude of services, including Employment and Day Support Services, and my role on the task force was to represent a provider that successfully ended their use of a 14C, special wage certificate. In 2016, that provider made the decision to let go of the certificate they'd held for many years in order to advance the stated mission of the organization, with no financial or technical support from the state or other organizations, unlike what is included and encouraged in the task force's recommendations.

When I have testified in support of this legislation previously, I have spoken to the fact that that organization made that choice, and the sky didn't fall. In fact, the employment services have thrived ever since.

However, in the hearing room, in your offices, and in the press, there is one thing that is loud and clear: people are afraid. In large part, parents are afraid that their adult children with disabilities will lose access to services, that the work they currently do will no longer be an option, or that their loved one, specifically, will be left behind.

I have sat in dozens and dozens of meetings with parents, guardians, and other providers talking about these exact fears in employment services and otherwise. They are warranted, and based on a lifetime of battling on behalf of their families and the people they serve. But, as providers, legislators, and advocates, it is our job to challenge these fears, and design systems that bring us beyond them, because the current systems, and all of those fears, are consistently holding people back. Those of us in these systems of power need to recognize our own culpability in perpetuating legalized ableism.

When my former employer exited that subminimum wage certificate, the majority of people kept their jobs. 7 of 8 businesses using the certificate chose to maintain their employees. Most people got a pay increase and were allowed to take on tasks they were restricted from when being paid subminimum wage. For the people that lost their jobs in the process they were then offered the chance to work with staff to explore employment ideas and opportunities they'd likely never been offered before. Many people currently being paid subminimum wages in a job have not, in good faith, been given the opportunity to make an informed decision about that work.

Employment services are designed to be individualized and person-centered. They include multiple stages to allow for an exploration of what that person's interests and skills are, the time to prepare for and execute a job search, and the ongoing supports a person needs to be

successful in their employment long term. I have watched countless people be successful through this process despite many barriers.

I have seen someone whose team never believed he'd be able to work not only get and maintain a job, but then be able to move out and live in his own, independent apartment.

I have seen a person whose interests were very specific and difficult to find without extensive education, which was a barrier to them because of their disability, who, with their staff, found a job that met their needs and a volunteer opportunity that fed their passions.

I have seen someone whose physical disability would make it difficult to use the restroom at an employer use the motivation they had to find that meaningful employment to drive them to work hard with a physical therapist and then use the restroom entirely on their own for the first time in their life.

I have watched as businesses changed their outdated thought processes on how to interview, accommodations on the job, and how the work needs to be done and found employees who can do things like monitor barges coming up the Mississippi River all day when they could never find someone to do that work previously.

Employment isn't the answer to all things. People with disabilities should be considered valued members of society even if employment isn't feasible for them, but with the right supports, a job at or above minimum wage is attainable for most people who want one. The reality is, in our current model, the state spends around \$200 million funding these sheltered workshops and spaces that pay subminimum wages, while only spending \$20 million on the employment services that can help people find the meaningful jobs like those listed above. Investing in the excellent staff and providers who walk alongside people in this process is what will assuage the fears of so many families and teams worried that their loved one won't have access to employment or supports.

I ask that all of you support the provisions in the house's bill that phase out subminimum wages in Minnesota. It is well past time to end this outdated and ableist practice, and support people with disabilities in the ways they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Raquel Sidie-Wagner