

March 12, 2024

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

Chair Hoffman and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

I work for a local non-profit agency, Reach for Resources. We support people with disabilities to find and maintain meaningful employment. We strive to ensure that the people we support are landing jobs that are competitive and inclusive. It is unfortunate that despite the amazing abilities these individuals have, they aren't paid equal and fair wages. It is so disheartening to know that people can be treated this way, especially in Minnesota, which is an Employment First state.

I am writing 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.

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 Subminimum Wage created a robust transition plan that would make sure no one is left behind in the transition away from 14(c). Service providers that have electively and successfully ended subminimum wage are available to provide technical assistance so other providers remain viable. And just last year, the legislature funded 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. People who do not want to work will have robust, enriching programming to support their needs during the day.

Minnesota has learned from the sixteen states nationwide that have already passed legislation protecting the rights of people with disabilities to earn minimum wage. It is time for us to follow their lead and 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.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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