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Senate Human Services Committee
MN Legislature

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

Dear Chair Hoffman and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Jon Nelson and I live and work in Duluth, Minnesota. I am the Executive Director of Residential Services, Inc. (RSI), a nonprofit organization providing support to people with disabilities. I am writing in support of S.F. 4399.

The issuance of 14(c) certificates to authorize payment of subminimum wages to people with disabilities is a practice that is now outdated and contrary to the best practices for serving people with disabilities. It is an embarrassment that Minnesota, a state that is typically a leader in disability rights, employs more people with disabilities earning subminimum wage than any other state in the nation.

It may seem challenging to make this change, but sixteen other states have done so and demonstrated how it can be done. In my own community, an employment provider (UDAC) with a long history of providing shelter-based employment using the 14(c) certificates, has made the transition to end the use of subminimum wages. UDAC was able to make use of the investments provided by the MN Legislature to succeed in this transition.

There will be people who cannot work a minimum wage job. Even now, much of the "work" being offered to these people is made up busy work. These people will be much better served with person-centered plan offering programming that meets their needs and their interests.

It is past the time to end the use of subminimum wage. Minnesota needs to follow the states leading the way in providing justice and integration for all citizens in employment. RSI is also an employment provider. We help people find jobs in the community. I have seen the impact having a real job in an integrated setting has for people with disabilities. It goes well beyond just making a fair wage, it provides meaning and purpose that benefits physical and mental health, just like it does for the rest of the population.

I hope this committee and the entire legislature will support wage equity for all Minnesotans by passing S.F. 4399. Thank you.

Respectfully,



Jon Nelson, Executive Director, RSI