

Tuesday March 12, 2024

To: Senate Human Services Committee
Re: Senate File 4399

Chair Hoffman and Committee Members,

We are writing in support of the important provisions in SF 4399 - specifically the provision to phase out the outdated practice of paying people with disabilities subminimum wages in Minnesota. These changes would affirm the civil rights of people with disabilities and align our state's policies with our state's values. This will help advance equity, drive social change, and protect human rights.

Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, passed in 1938, allows people with disabilities to be paid less than the state or federal minimum wage. It is an archaic and discriminatory practice that contributes to the cycle of poverty and results in segregation of people with disabilities.

Ending payment of subminimum wages to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities while expanding community-based employment and day support services is possible because of investments last session in technical assistance and trainings offered by the Minnesota Transformation Technical Assistance Center (MTI) through the UMN's Institute on Community Integration. Employment providers in Minnesota and across the country have been transforming to services focused on competitive employment for decades. Organizational transformation that is intentional often results in greater community inclusion and better quality of life for people with disabilities. Research supports this, and providers that have successfully made these transformations have stories demonstrating this.

All individuals with disabilities – no matter their support needs – deserve the opportunity to explore, find, and keep jobs and careers that provide personal fulfillment and help build wealth. People with IDD should have supports from individuals and systems to help them find and keep jobs based on their preferences, interests, and strengths.

It's time for Minnesota to look to the future and align our values of inclusion and opportunity into practice through our public policy.

Julie Bershadsky, Director of Community Living and Employment, ICI, UMN

