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March 11, 2025

TO: The Honorable Jennifer A. McEwen, Chair, Senate Committee on Labor  
3217 Minnesota Senate Bldg.  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
CC: Labor Committee Members  
RE: Support for SF2149

This letter is to express the strong support of the National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota for the phase-out of the use of subminimum wage certificates under 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act as provided in SF2149. we have always believed that the payment of subminimum wages to disabled workers was a harmful and discriminatory practice that created unequal, segregated, and, in some cases, unsafe working conditions. During the 87 years since the establishment of the program under Section 14(c), greater awareness about the capacities of people with disabilities, along with serious concerns about the exploitative and discriminatory nature of this model, have come to light. It is time to end subminimum wages for people with disabilities.

In 2022, Minnesota was awarded a 13 million dollar federal grant to transition away from subminimum wage employment. In 2023, the Minnesota legislature took meaningful steps by establishing grants, additional reporting requirements, and a technical assistance center to help employers transition away from the subminimum wage model and pay people a fair wage for the work they do while retaining other needed services. Many facilities have reduced their use of subminimum wages, and some have given up their certificates entirely.

Nearly half of all states have prohibited or limited the use of subminimum wage through successful implementation of models providing competitive, community-integrated employment while retaining other critical services. To learn from the experiences of other states, the Minnesota Disability Law Center studied five states: Oregon, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Maryland. The data show that, with resources and careful planning, the transitions have been overwhelmingly successful. Claims that people with severe disabilities will be left without a place to go and without opportunities are also shown to be unfounded.

In 2025, Minnesota should affirmatively end the discriminatory practice by setting a date after which the use of 14(c) certificates in Minnesota will be prohibited. Please support SF2149.

The National Federation of the Blind defends the rights of blind people of all ages and provides information and support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. Founded in 1920, we are the transformative membership and advocacy organization of blind Minnesotans with chapters and divisions across the state. We believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Dunnam".

Jennifer Dunnam  
Chair, Governmental Affairs Committee