

February 20, 2019

To: Senate Workforce Committee

From: Ross Ryan, Community Advocate, Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition

RE: Support for SB 494 to pay people with disabilities minimum wage or higher

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Chair Taylor and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition (OSAC) is a statewide nonprofit organization made up of individual self-advocates and 18 local self-advocacy groups. We bring self-advocates together to speak with one voice about things that matter to them. OSAC's vision for people with disabilities is that they be as independent as possible and fit into their communities. Employment is important to us because we want to earn a living wage and build lives, just like everyone else.

Minimum wage exists for everyone so people can pay their bills and contribute back to their communities. Yet, today people with disabilities can be paid less than minimum wage.

Paying people with disabilities less than minimum wage shows that people with disabilities are valued less than everyone else – like second class citizens. We are just like everyone else, we just may need some different supports. We deserve to be paid just like everyone else for our work.

Ending subminimum wage is a priority for OSAC. Our employment statement says that all people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) should have living wage jobs in their communities. We believe subminimum wage is discriminatory and keeps people with disabilities in poverty.

Oregon's communities are better when people with disabilities are working in their communities. We want to work side-by-side our co-workers and show people we can do the job based on our skills and work ethic. We are no different from anyone else, we may have some different challenges but we can do the work and pay taxes.

Today, I'm a paid community advocate for OSAC. This means I advocate for people with IDD in meetings here at the Capitol, at DHS and also at the national level.

I'm also a board member for the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE). This is a national movement to ensure all people with disabilities have employment opportunities in their communities. APSE believes all states should end subminimum wage. People with disabilities can work and be paid minimum wage or higher, just like everyone else.

Now I make higher than minimum wage. This makes it possible for me to be more independent and have more choices in where I live. Being paid minimum wage and higher means that people with disabilities can buy houses, socialize with friends, and go on vacation – just like other citizens.

OSAC's hope for future generations of people with disabilities is that they will transition out of school to employment that pays them minimum wage or higher so they can live the life they want.