

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNalley, and members of the House Labor and Commerce Committee, thank you for the opportunity for me and our statewide membership of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio to give testimony in support of this very important legislation, House Bill 225, the Employment First and Greater Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act, which Reps. Jarrells and Young have introduced.

I realize that you will hear from others who can offer a wide array of personal experiences working at less than the minimum wage in Ohio, but I ask you to take a moment to consider the dignity you have from working in a full-time job with benefits. Consider that you are likely to have health insurance that covers your medical care and probably saved your life if you are diagnosed with a serious or catastrophic health condition. Think of some of the other fringe benefits you might receive from your job, such as a 401 (k) or flexible spending plan. I'm sure most of you take these benefits somewhat for granted.

Now imagine being cut off from these benefits for the simple reason that you are Blind or have another developmental disability, and some other people, like family members, school counselors, or a state agency have decided that you are not capable of working in a regular job making even the minimum wage.

That is the reality for many Blind people working in workshop facilities. It has been the reality of many leaders in our state and national organization, including the president and vice president of our Ohio Affiliate, who can speak more to their personal experiences than me.

Section 14 ( c ) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which allows for employers to exclude many members of the Blind community in these workshop facilities from paying the minimum wage, dates back to 1938, a time when people with disabilities were considered incapable, incompetent, and essentially unworthy of participation at even a basic level in society. Eugenics, the idea that entire classes of people were unfit to breed or function as basic human beings, was the norm, even among those who considered themselves enlightened or progressive.

Since 1940, when our national organization was founded, we have fought against subminimum wages for members of the Blind Community. I can outline what this bill will do, as many will, so I don't necessarily want to repeat their words. Understand that this bill will integrate many members of the Blind community who work in workshop facilities in communities like yours into the mainstream workforce. It would provide a non-refundable 15% tax credit to businesses who use the services of a nonprofit who certified that they pay employees at fair market wages. It will also provide employers and employees currently making less than the minimum wage a full range of supports to transition them gradually and systematically from piece work to dignified, satisfying jobs. It will require employers to provide health insurance, though an employee is not required to take it—no different if you are in a mainstream job at the State House or the Riffe Center, you have a spouse who has insurance, and you opt to be covered under their benefits. I'm sure everyone will agree that these changes represent the basics of what it means to be an American, despite your background or party affiliation.

I want to conclude my testimony by urging all of you to read the book, "[Twenty-Two Cents an Hour: Disability Rights and the Fight to End Subminimum Wages](#)". This book illustrates in graphic and sometimes tragic terms the brutal impact that the practice of subminimum wages had had on workers.

WE ask you to support H.B. 225 and thank you, Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNalley, and members of the House Labor and Commerce Committee for the opportunity to give testimony hear today.