

House Bill 225

Meralyse Dessert

Proponent Testimony

Hello, Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, and Ranking Member McNally, my name is Meralyse Dessert, I am 26 years old, almost 27, and have Autism. I live independently in my parents' house while they are in Georgia. I attend college and am currently awaiting hearing back on whether or not I have gotten a job I really want.

When you have a job, you work hard at it and always do your best, and this should certainly be compensated appropriately. It should be no different for people with developmental disabilities. In fact, paying a person with developmental disabilities subminimum wage is an example of discrimination against those with different abilities than others, which is the exact opposite of what we should be striving for in our state and our country.

Having a developmental disability affects a large aspect of how you interact with the community, and often times makes even the simplest interactions harder. Being paid a fair wage would help people with disabilities feel more included and like they are actually contributing to society in a meaningful way and getting back as much good as they give out.

I received fair pay at a job of mine and it made a large difference in my quality of life. I was able to afford to do things with friends and family, and to get things I wanted within reason, and didn't feel like I had to give up on my wants and needs to simply make ends meet.

Being paid fair wages has helped me, because although I also receive Social Security, I still have many obligations. I pay rent to my parents and contribute to one third of all our bills. This takes up most of my Social Security, and without a job that pays fair wages, it would ultimately limit my ability to go out and interact with others in the community. Paying for gas for my car to go places, paying to go out with friends to eat or see a movie, all of it costs money and without fair wages, people like me couldn't afford to do these things as well as meet their obligations.

People with developmental disabilities are an asset to their employer, not only because they bring a new perspective that is different from what others might be used to, but also because of their strong ability to be kind and make sure others feel included, especially since they know what it's like to be excluded.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.