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Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally, and members of the Ohio House of Representatives Commerce and Labor Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill (HB) 225, the Ohio Employment First and Greater Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act.

I am here today to urge the House Commerce and Labor Committee to pass HB 225.

I am an individual with two disabilities. I am legally blind, and I have a moderate to severe hearing loss. My first job while still in school was as a dining room attendant at the Ohio State School for the Blind (OSSB). At the time, OSSB was able to pay students working in the dining room far below the prevailing minimum wage. So, for that first job I earned \$0.35 per hour.

That was not a lot of money even for those days. My non-disabled peers in my hometown were earning far more than I was life guarding at the pool, flipping burgers at McDonald's, mowing people's yards, et. It took me working hours to get to a point where I earned what they earned in a single hour. Their weekly salaries far outpaced mine, which allowed them to pay for many recreational activities that I couldn't afford. I remember it being embarrassing and frustrating.

Yet, 40+ years later Ohio law still permits any employer to apply for exemptions so that they can pay any worker with a disability far below the minimum wage. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of workers in Ohio earning well below Ohio's minimum wage. Sometimes these employees are still paid below a \$1 per hour. And these are adults, not teenagers.

Imagine the embarrassment and frustration as an adult of earning below the minimum wage! This embarrassment and frustration is compounded when the worker with a disability earning far below the minimum wage is working alongside a non-disabled worker who is being paid the minimum wage, or more, for doing the exact same work, which happens far too often. It is hard enough in our current economy to survive on minimum

wage. It is completely impossible to become self-sufficient when earning sub-minimum wage. Allowing employers to continue to pay workers with disabilities below the minimum wage will only achieve one goal – to keep these workers from achieving independence and self-sufficiency.

The exemptions allowing employers to pay workers with disabilities sub-minimum wage were originally created to encourage employers to employ individuals with disabilities. If these exemptions ever had a viable purpose, that purpose has long since passed. Today we have anti-discrimination laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, that ensure equal access to employment for individuals with disabilities.

Yet, you will hear people testify, particularly parents of adults with severe disabilities, that sub-minimum wages are still needed to ensure that individuals with disabilities can have a job. These people mean well. They fear adults with severe disabilities becoming isolated because organizations employing them for sub-minimum wage say the jobs will disappear if sub-minimum wage goes away. Unfortunately, much like society in general, the people who fear the loss of sub-minimum wage don't understand or believe in the full capacity of people with disabilities to work and become self-sufficient and independent.

Sub-minimum wage is also unfair for workers with disabilities because many of the organizations that pay sub-minimum wage employ the workers with disabilities to work on Federal Government contracts where the organizations earn significant revenue. And in some cases, the organization CEOs are earning well into the six figure salary range, even over a half million per year, while they pay workers with disabilities far below the minimum wage.

So, I call upon the Ohio Legislature to pass HB 225 to end the cycle of dependance for workers with disabilities earning sub-minimum wage, to encourage striving for independence and self-sufficiency, and to treat workers with disabilities with the same dignity enjoyed by non-disabled workers of being guaranteed earning at least the statutory minimum wage.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding this testimony.