

Dear Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in favor of H.B.225. I am blind, and, though I have never been forced to work for subminimum wages, I have worked with those who have, and a number of my friends have experienced this demeaning work. Sheltered shop administrators and those who run other manufacturing programs largely intended to employ disabled workers use their Section 14 (c) certificates of exemption from paying the minimum wage to increase their income. I assure you that the blind workers I know frequently out-produce the able bodied workers brought in when they are needed to complete a job on time. Frequently they are required to train the new workers who are earning minimum wage or above. This is a very discouraging situation for the disabled workers.

Parents of disabled workers are often afraid that their kids cannot work competitively, but in the states that have already stopped using the subminimum wage certificates this has not been the case, and parents are pleased to discover that their kids really can compete. Rhode Island was, I believe, the first state to discover this fact, and now pays disabled workers at least the minimum wage statewide.

Often when disabled workers cannot work competitively, it is because they have not been matched with jobs that they can actually do. A blind friend of mine ran a workshop where he found a woman with CP which forced her to work sitting down. She was struggling to work with heavy rubber mats that she could not lift easily from a seated position. He took her out of that job and allowed her to conduct an answering service where she answered phones and took messages. She was able to establish her own business once she was given work that she could do efficiently.

Disabled people deserve a chance to demonstrate their capacity and earn above the minimum wage. Ohio should not be allowing employers to run competitive shops on the backs of and funded by their disabled workers,.