

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally, and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee,

Thank you for accepting this testimony in support of House Bill 225.

Anne, our 27-year-old daughter with Down syndrome, did piece work at a sheltered workshop as part of a job training internship program one high school summer. She learned how to put items in a small plastic box, not a skill applicable to many other jobs. There was no focus on soft employment skills, nor training intended to help her be a better employee. On some days, she and other “employees” watched movies. After that summer, she never went back.

Instead, she volunteered for a member of Cincinnati City Council. Another summer she worked at the Cincinnati Chamber. Ultimately, she got an after-school job at Kroger and since graduation, has continued to work there, some 8 ½ years later.

Anne doesn’t tell time, can’t make change and doesn’t distinguish between the price of a greeting card and the cost of an iPhone. Her conversations veer toward Disney movies and celebrities and sometimes it’s hard to understand what she’s saying. I share this only to demonstrate that people of all skill sets can be successful in competitive, integrated employment. Earning real wages, doing real work and paying real taxes.

Anne works as a bagger. On her feet for hours on end. She chats with her customers. She smiles. She doesn’t break eggs or smash bread. She hefts cases of water and bags of dog food. She talks to toddlers sitting in grocery carts. She’s not perfect. Sometimes she takes a longer break than allowed and gets in trouble, as any other employee would. She earns \$13.00/hour and uses her money to pay rent, go out to dinner, pay for her clothes and her vacations and add to her savings account.

Maybe Anne would have been content to stay at that sheltered workshop, sitting around watching movies, never being asked to do more, never having consequences for failing to do her job. But we, her parents, knew she could do more, and she did and she thrived. She loved her other work experiences. She’s proud of her job at Kroger. She is known in her workplace and liked by her customers.

She deserved the chance to work at a real job with real wages, like the rest of us. There’s dignity in work. There’s dignity to risk. Anne and others with disabilities deserve that dignity and certainly deserve to be paid a fair wage for it. Please support H.B.225.

Thank you.

Jane Gerhardt

8066 Meadowcreek Dr.

Cincinnati, OH 45244

[Jegerhardt9@gmail.com](mailto:Jegerhardt9@gmail.com)

513-314-1135