



HB 225 Proponent Testimony  
Jen Powers Alge  
Ohio House Commerce and Labor Committee  
Chair Johnson  
May 13, 2025

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally, and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee: I am writing to you today to provide proponent testimony for HB 225. My name is Jen Powers Alge and I am the regional Director of the Arc of Ohio. I have two children with developmental disabilities. Right now, there are people in our community who make less than a dollar an hour. Ohio House Bill 225, a bipartisan bill, was introduced by Representative Jarrells and Representative Young to finally end this dated practice.

My experience raising children with developmental disabilities taught me early on that they, just by being who they are right now, have value in our community. I know from spending so much time with my children that their inclusion, while cumbersome, is necessary for their subsistence after I'm gone and I can't prove their value from behind closed doors. Community integration is the only option for us.

The gamechanger for me and my generation of parents has been the access of an expanding discourse that has included people with disabilities. People who were once isolated in institutions for being nonverbal, now have the access and technology they need to communicate. Once I started learning from people with autism, my gut feelings about my son and his abilities were validated. I never want to sound cliché or romanticizing about my children and their worth, but it's evident to those of us who get a front row seat to their lives how essential their presence is in our communities.

Most parents tend to speak highly of their children. However, in the lead up to this bill, I've witnessed parents speak disparagingly about their own children in ways that I never thought I'd hear in private, let alone a public meeting. Since I have younger kids, my perspective on this issue is sometimes viewed as naïve but I can't help feeling a pain in my stomach when I hear someone talk about a person with autism or Down syndrome so despairingly. Often their child is not at the meeting, but there are people with disabilities present and I can see their pain. How can we share this experience of raising children with disabilities and have such differing opinions as to their value in our society?

As we debate this issue, it has become clear there is a generational divide. There is a reason for this. We have a long, disturbing history of treating people with disabilities as less than, often hiding them away in institutional settings and not allowing them access to our communities. But I feel fortunate to have raised my kids in a time where people with disabilities do live in our communities, are speaking up and lead the effort to full community inclusion. We've been given access, as a generation, to enrich our beliefs and hear from people with different life experiences than most. Every time we see and hear from a person with a disability, it expands the framework for full community integration. It's only fair that the generation that actually lives

among people with disabilities and has benefited from their point of view should lead on this issue.

As long as we have these old policies on the books, we allow the old framework of disability in our state to endure and many people with disabilities left exploited and isolated. Ohio is an Employment First state and that program alone should bring this old law from 1938 out of the shadows and into the light where we, as a state, can decide who we are. I believe people with disabilities are valuable citizens in Ohio and if they are working, they should be paid at least minimum wage like everyone else. Let's start the process of ending and unwinding subminimum wage in Ohio and pass HB 225 now. Thank you Chair Johnson and the entire House Commerce and Labor Committee.

Sincerely,  
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Regional Director  
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