

HB 225

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally, and Esteemed members of this committee,

I am writing this today as an interested party in HB 225—to end subminimum wage jobs in Ohio. As the mother of a severely disabled and medically complex child, it pains me to think that her worth and ability would be measured so lowly.

All humans, regardless of ability, should be paid equitably. One person's time and energy should not have a greater worth than another's. Many other states (Alaska, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, Colorado, California, Delaware, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Rhode Island) have already taken this step in refusing to pay workers less than minimum wage.

Many opponents to ending subminimum wage will argue that it allows people with the most severe and profound disabilities to earn money—allowing them to contribute to society. Indeed, a lot of these opponents are even parents, like me. Parents who have seen firsthand the way that our children are often devalued by culture. I agree, wholeheartedly, that people with severe and profound disabilities need to have opportunities to be productive and valued members of our state and communities. However, I challenge the idea that the way to accomplish this is by paying them mere cents for time spent working.

Parents of children and adults with disabilities have been fed a lie for years. A lie that tells us the only path to value and belonging is within the walls of sheltered workshops, we have been told that our children's disabilities are too severe, too off-putting for them to have any sort of acceptance outside of those four walls. Afraid of taking the chance of our loved ones being rejected, we have clung to the narrative and allowed people with disabilities to be treated as second-class citizens. We have allowed them to be segregated, and their value reduced to what trinket they can put together for meager cents per piece.

Ohio is an employment first state, something I acknowledge with pride. Employment can lead to fulfillment and meaning in life. However, we cannot legally accept the dehumanization of people with disabilities by continuing with an outdated method of payment. People with disabilities deserve to be paid the same as a non-disabled person.

Additionally, while there are many great and fulfilling things about having a paying job, we must not assume that this is the only path for people with disabilities to be valued and find belonging. It is short sighted to assume that segregation and lesser pay is the only way to reach this goal. I do not know if my child will ever maintain a job or join the workforce like her siblings will or her peers. I believe that my child's value does not exist on her employability.

We must be willing to push the boundaries of what we have been told for so long, we must find ways to continue to fight for inclusion and community belonging, and we must not take cheap substitutes in place of that. Ohio has come too far to allow people with disabilities to be reduced to what they can produce for us and identify people's gifts and strengths. This may not always be employment. Everyone should get the opportunity to exist and be valued for who they are, but this is not accomplished through pity pay. Give people with disabilities the opportunity to earn a fair and equitable wage, without the disrespect of making them work all day for a \$10 check every two weeks.

We have an amazing system in Ohio that supports people with disabilities, we have amazing providers in Ohio that work daily to ensure people with disabilities are living their best lives and are thriving. We can find ways to support the most severe and profound people with disabilities without degrading the value and worth of their time. We can continue to work towards community belonging and membership that is person-centered to what each individual needs it to be. If we, as a system, spent our energy working towards valued belonging as we did trying to save outdated forms of segregation—I do believe the outcomes would positively change the way that Ohioans with disabilities are accepted into our communities.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohioans with disabilities, their families, and their communities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Davies". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Sarah" and last name "Davies" clearly legible.

Sarah Davies