

Testimony in Support of House Bill 225

By Nonnie Byrd & Malachi Lewis-Byrd

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Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, we are writing to express our strong support for House Bill 225 that ensures a fair, living minimum wage for people with disabilities. Every individual, regardless of ability, deserves equal treatment, dignity, and opportunity in the workplace. That includes the right to earn a fair wage for their labor.

For too long, employers have been permitted to pay workers with disabilities significantly less than the minimum wage. While originally intended to increase employment opportunities, this exemption has perpetuated inequity and undervalued the contributions of people with disabilities.

My son Malachi is 23 years old with Autism. His level of Autism prevents him from being able to live on his own. His SSDI income is supplemented by his part time job. Those wages are critical to ensure his quality of life. A fair minimum wage should be a requirement for all individuals with disabilities, especially since SSDI is not enough to pay for normal living expenses. In our case my VA Disability income covers the rest of his living expenses, but many individuals with disabilities don't have that option.

Today, we know that people with disabilities can and do perform valuable work across every sector of the economy. With the right supports and inclusive practices, they thrive in competitive, integrated workplaces. Continuing to allow subminimum wages sends the wrong message: that their labor is less worthy, their skills less important, and their contributions less valued.

A fair minimum wage is not only an economic issue, but also a civil rights issue. It reflects our collective values and our commitment to building a society that is just, inclusive, and equitable for all.

I urge you to support House Bill 225 that ends the subminimum wage for people with disabilities and instead invest in inclusive employment programs that promote opportunity, independence, and equality.

Sincerely,

Nonnie Byrd & Malachi Lewis-Byrd

