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Chair Koehler, Vice-chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for Senate Bill 142, which would phase out subminimum wage for individuals with disabilities.

The birth of subminimum wage practices for disabled workers began in 1938 under the US Department of Labor's section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act¹ as a way to create a place for disabled Veteran's to get back to work and to find their place in society. This practice started out as a revolutionary policy that said we would not simply discard disabled workers, but that we would make a place for them in society and give them the freedom to be productive citizens who could earn wages to support their living. There was a time when this policy was helpful and even necessary to ensure that willing citizens, despite their varying abilities, could work if they chose to. However, now when many Ohio homes struggle to provide for their basic needs even when all earners are making the state minimum wage, it is time that we move past the dehumanizing practice of paying disable workers less than their worth.

According to the US Department of Labor, at the end of 2024 there were still about 40,000 disabled workers nationwide receiving subminimum wages.² Though this number has decreased from the approximately 67,000 disable workers receiving subminimum wage in July of 2022,³ this number is still far too high. The reality is that our economy and social landscapes have evolved beyond needing to implement such policies any longer. We live in a time where there is not a question of whether people with disabilities have the capacity to still be productive members of society. If we trust them to work, which they surely can, then we should live up to the ideal that they also are entitled to equal and fair treatment under the law. Ohio can and should

¹ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/39e-14c-hourly-wages>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/subminimum-wage-disability-disabled-workers/>

³ <https://www.ncsl.org/labor-and-employment/trends-in-disability-employment-legislation#:~:text=Continued%20Interest%20in%20Elimination%20of,in%20the%202022%2D23%20session>

make history as a leader in the Midwest region for the cause of equal pay for Ohioans with disabilities.

Since 2015, only 16 States have passed legislation ending subminimum wage, but of those currently 15 have fully implemented the policy.⁴ Among them are Georgia, Alaska, California, South Carolina, and Washington DC to name a few. Of those 16 states, the only state in our region to abolish subminimum wage for disabled workers became Illinois when they passed the Dignity in Pay Act late last year. Their policy will phase out subminimum wage over the course of 5 years.⁵ Senate Bill 142 would do the same. I understand that this may feel like a big shift for some organizations, so this bill would not require that this policy be implemented over night. However, it would guarantee that our state move in the right direction towards showing the disabled workers of Ohio that we value their contributions just as much as we value the work of any other resident of Ohio. Disabilities can come at any stage of life, sometimes without warning. It is possible for each of us to become disabled at some point, therefore advocating for the equality of disabled individuals truly is advocacy for us all.

I urge the committee to schedule proponent testimony for SB 142. This will not only allow for a thorough discussion of the bill's provisions but also provide an opportunity for the public to voice their support and concerns.

⁴ <https://www.marca.com/en/lifestyle/us-news/personal-finance/2023/02/12/63e8aa0d268e3ebf7a8b45cc.html>

⁵ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/subminimum-wage-disability-disabled-workers/>