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Opportunity & Dignity for Adults with Disabilities

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March 1, 2023

Chair Fischer & Members  
House Human Services Policy Committee  
551 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Fischer and Committee Members,

It is my understanding that a bill proposed by Rep. Hanson is on the agenda this evening for an “informational hearing.” I am writing on behalf Achieve Services and the people we serve, asking you to please oppose the Hanson bill, which proposes to eliminate 14c jobs and the option for Minnesotans with disabilities to perform work at a special minimum wage.

Pre-COVID, Achieve served about 195 adults with developmental disabilities. Due to the ongoing workforce crisis in the disability services industry, we currently serve 160. Over 50% are working in community jobs at least 2 days per week, making minimum wage or better. About 60 % perform at least some work at our site, sometimes receiving wages below minimum wage but commensurate with their productivity. We have been through multiple U.S. DOL audits over the years to ensure that our workers doing 14c work are paid fairly.

I can assure you that the Hanson language is NOT supported by the workers at Achieve, or their families. Our workers who perform 14c work have made an *informed choice* to do so. The people we serve are always given choices – they can seek competitive employment in the community, they can perform 14c work at our site, and they can focus on other life-enriching opportunities outside of employment, and most choose some combination of those options. Many choose 14c work because they and/or their families want work in a safe, supported environment, particularly those who are vulnerable and would be at risk in a community job. But it is always their choice.

Despite what you might be hearing from the well-intentioned “advocates,” if 14c opportunities go away, then so will jobs. In fact, our largest employment partner has advised us as follows:

*“...if we are required to pay minimum wages to all, then we will be forced to give our work to the most productive workers. As a result, jobs will be diverted from people with disabilities to workers who are the most productive. To think that this will not result in significant job losses for people with disabilities is simply disingenuous.”*

I can absolutely assure you that eliminating 14c will result in thousands of people losing their only opportunity for employment. Some will undoubtedly find competitive work in the community, but for many, community employment will not be a viable option. They will be left with no opportunity to work. Losing jobs means losing not just a paycheck, but dignity, self-respect, friendships, and the chance to contribute to their community. Rather than eliminating employment opportunities, we strongly believe we should be focused on *increasing* those opportunities.

Finally, if you are inclined to support the Hanson bill, then I'd ask you to visit Achieve, and meet with the people who will be losing their jobs if 14c work is eliminated. They'd love to share their stories with you.

Thank you for considering this request. I sincerely hope you will oppose the elimination of *any* employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas H. Weaver  
CEO, Achieve Services