

May 1, 2024

Dear House and Senate Committee Members:

My name is Margie Sillery and my son, Adam Sillery, attends a day training and habilitation program through Opportunity Partners. He is paid a commensurate wage through 14C.

Adam is severely autistic and has an IQ of around 60. He is not competitively employable. Through the day program he attends, he can work at his pace and be productive. He learns work skills. He is among people who work at his pace and higher. He is in a safe environment. I believe that this option allows him to be as independent as possible.

For many individuals with intellectual disabilities, community employment is not a good choice. In competitive employment, they would have to produce at the same rate of productivity as their typical peers. However, in a structured program, they gain valuable skills. In many cases, individuals with intellectual disabilities are able to bridge the gap and eventually work in the community. Without the option to learn to work at their own pace, they may never get the needed skills to move forward.

I believe that 14C is a choice that should **not** be eliminated. I would argue that having this choice strengthens the effort to employ more individuals with disabilities, because it gives them a starting point. Rather than weaken the opportunities for individuals with disabilities, I believe it strengthens them, because without 14C there would be no starting point. Despite popular opinion, Minnesota is successful in employing individuals with disabilities because of having the choice of a continuum of services that allow everyone to work. I know this for a fact, because I almost 10 years working as an employment specialist and a job coach.

Sincerely yours,

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