

March 19, 2021

Written Testimony in support of H.F. 439

Committee on Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy.

Dear Chair Eklund and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mary Martin. I am from Hibbing, which is located in Northern St. Louis County. My husband and I have two adult children. Our son Richard is a 37 year old man with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). I am writing to you today in support of H.F. 439 and thank you for the opportunity to share our son's employment journey.

I won't presume to tell you his story in his words, these are mine. I will however share briefly a few my guiding principles as a Mom. Richard has the same rights as I do to make informed choices, to risk failure, work toward a secure financial future. I believe there is dignity in work, dignity in risk and dignity in making informed choices. I believe that choice implies two or more options. I also believe that to be "informed" choices information must be provided to people in the manner that they will best understand.

Twelve years ago Richard, who had been volunteering the community for some time wanted a "real" job in the community. As a graduate of Partners in Policymaking (class 26) he knew about something called Supported Employment. Together we searched for SE providers in Northern St. Louis County and found one. We worked with Voc Reb to approach this provider clearly asking for help finding a job in the community. Richard was encouraged to utilize the provider's pre-vocational services in a neighboring community while looking for a job in his own community.

Every annual meeting was the same. Goals were written without his input, were not reflective of his interests or talents and were presented to us at the meeting. We would ask about progress toward finding a job only to be told by his county case manager, "There are no jobs." "You need to understand that you live in a depressed area." "Unemployment is too high." "Employers don't want to make accommodations." We were told by the case manager that the service provider felt our expectations were unrealistically high, that we over estimated Richard's abilities and expected too much.

Fast forward several years to the adoption of Minnesota's Employment First policy. We quickly learned to ask the same question in a different way, referencing things like Olmstead and the Employment First policy. The initial response from the provider was to contact me after the annual meeting to tell me that I was the only parent who was being "difficult" and that perhaps I would like to look elsewhere for services. Living in a rural area, there aren't a lot of other options.

Long time managers began to retire. Incoming replacements brought a wealth of knowledge about the Employment First Policy and a passion for making it happen.

In 2018 Richard was asked to become a Learning Partner with an individual who was going through the Discovery certification process as a part of becoming a Supported Employment Service provider. (Yes, the same provider who advertised being a SE

provider in 2008 was actually seeking the certification in 2018!)

In June of 2018 at the end of the first phase of the process, a small group of community members gathered to brainstorm job possibilities. This group was made up of family and friends who had connections in the community.

In December of 2018 Richard was offered a position with a local company. A need was identified that matched Richard's skill set and they customized a job for him that considered not only his abilities but also addressed environmental considerations such as a quiet work area, and clear consistent, plain language instructions.

Richard is now the Assistant Office Manager at H & L Mesabi in Hibbing. His primary responsibilities include maintaining a digital library of blueprints (scanning documents) which will enable all branches of the company to readily access information. He is also responsible for bulk mailings.

Richard's direct supervisor is the Territory Manager for H & L Mesabi. He had participated in the community meeting and after identifying an unmet need in his own company, created the position with Richard in mind. After just a few weeks with an on-site job coach Richard's supervisor opted to be Richard's "natural support" on the job. Feedback we have received from the supervisor is that Richard has exceeded expectations!

Richard is approaching his 2 year anniversary with the company. Because of his job he had a choice to move from MA to MAEPD. He now has the ability to earn and save money. He can have assets such as retirement plans that do not affect his MA eligibility. This is the same individual with I/DD who cannot make change and will always need supports in his life and like of many of us will have someone help with taxes.

I believe HF 439 is creating an opportunity to phase out subminimum wage with the least disruption to the lives of people being served. It will give the time needed for the disability community to come together and develop new strategies and ideas which will support the concept of "person-centered" choices.

Mary L. Martin

