



## NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF CONNECTICUT

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Elizabeth Rival, President

### Testimony in Favor of Raised House Bill 5279

#### An Act Eliminating the Minimum Fair Wage Exception for Certain Citizens of Connecticut

Dear Labor & Public Employees Committee Members,

The National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut supports Raised House Bill 5279 which fosters fair compensation for those with disabilities. We believe that those with disabilities need to be given the same employment opportunities that all working adults in Connecticut receive. H.B.5279 is a major step in the direction of equality. It has been demonstrated that the 75-year-old practice of paying those with a disability pennies per hour is an outdated system that does not work well.

The assumption that disabled workers are not as productive as their non-disabled counterparts is false. This assumption has been disproven with the countless modern employment models that have been put into practice across the country. Satellite locations of Goodwill Industries and National Industries for the Blind (NIB) are successful while paying disabled employees at or above minimum wage. The justification that sub-minimum wage workshops can be used as a stepping stone to full-wage employment is inaccurate. Data shows that less than five percent of disabled workers placed in sub-minimum wage workshops successfully transition to a competitive employment model. Numerous sub-minimum wage employment models have shifted successfully to a model which guarantees all their employees at least the same minimum or above-minimum wage that their non-disabled workers enjoy.

The practice of sheltered workshops paying their workers pennies per hour while the executives of the same workshop make six-, or sometimes seven-figure salaries, is revolting. This system is discriminatory and does not provide an environment where initiative is rewarded. Ninety-five percent of disabled workers that are employed in a sub-minimum wage paying workshop stay there permanently. Let's change this unjust arrangement to a system of which all Connecticut residents can be proud. Please pass Raised House Bill 5279.

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### **Labor & Public Employees Committee Testimony in Favor of House Bill 5279**

The National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut supports House Bill 5279, An Act Eliminating the Minimum Fair Wage Exception for Certain Citizens of Connecticut. The State of Connecticut State Statutes currently allows our Commissioner to grant exceptions to employers, permitting them to pay workers with disabilities less than the minimum wage. This is based on the false assumption that disabled workers are less productive than nondisabled workers, but successful employment models have emerged in the last seventy-five years to assist people with significant disabilities in acquiring the job skills needed for competitive work.

This discriminatory policy is not necessary for the successful operation of a disability-training program. In reality, the overwhelming majority of the National Industries for the Blind (NIB) affiliates operates successfully without paying subminimum wages. Countless entities have successfully transitioned their subminimum wage business model of low expectations to an innovative model of competitive integrated training and employment, meeting the growing needs of mainstream employers with the proven talents of employees with disabilities. Only outdated workshops argue they will be unable to manage worthwhile programs.

The subminimum wage model fails to provide adequate training or employment to disabled workers. Data shows that less than five percent of workers with disabilities in segregated subminimum wage workshops will transition into competitive integrated work. Moreover, research shows that the subminimum wage model costs more but actually produces less! It is poor policy to reward such failed programs with wage exemptions, preferential federal contracts, and public and charitable contributions.

Please pass Raised House Bill 5279.

#### **For more information contact:**

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