



TESTIMONY

Labor and Public Employees Committee Public Hearing

February 27, 2014

Hannah Jurewicz, Senior Director

Dungarvin CT, LLC

**RAISED BILL HB 5279: 'AN ACT ELIMINATING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE
EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN CITIZENS OF CONNECTICUT.**

Good afternoon members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Hannah Jurewicz and I am Senior Director with Dungarvin CT.

Like many of the other community agencies in CT, Dungarvin provides residential and day services for individuals with intellectual and related disabilities throughout the state. The adults we serve live in homes in Torrington and the Greater Waterbury area, Bristol, Hartford, Canton, Windsor and Windsor Locks, Plymouth, Manchester, Prospect, Cheshire, Middletown, and Greater New Haven. We support them as they perform meaningful work in these communities; we assist them when they contribute to the commerce of their towns by shopping, dining, and enjoying various recreational interests.

I am testifying today against the bill in its present form. I wholeheartedly support and advocate for the just and fair treatment of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of life. However, this bill has unintended consequences that will obstruct employment opportunities for many people with disabilities. This bill, if passed, will leave adults who have disabilities without meaningful work to do, compromise their ability to contribute to their communities, and pay their bills.

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We all agree that work is valued and strongly support both the tangible and intangible benefits of working. We all need to work toward equality for individuals with disabilities in all things, including wages. But what about those individuals who are not able to meet performance standards or perform the essential functions that a job may require? With this bill passed, what will become of those people? Do they not deserve the same rights to work and earn the tangible and intangible benefits?

Many providers and/or employers in CT provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be employed and paid a salary commensurate with their abilities. Without such programs or arrangements, many individuals with disabilities would not have opportunities for work, might have nowhere to go on a daily basis, and could lose the opportunity to be independent and live a life of dignity and choice.

In many instances, individuals with a disability have a programmatic relationship with their "employer" which does not constitute an employment relationship in the legal sense. Again, this is not for purpose of exploitation but rather to increase opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be employed.

Approximately 75-80% of individuals with disabilities are unemployed. HB 5279 would in reality decrease the number of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The National Council on Disabilities in their 2012 *Subminimum Wage and Supported Employment Report*, recommended that the Section 14(c) program should be phased out gradually to provide adequate time for transition to new alternatives. The Committee recognized early on in this project that any statement of public policy or recommendation to the U.S. Department of Labor or the Congress to simply eliminate all Section 14(c) certificates would jeopardize the security of many individuals who are currently involved with the program. (p 16).

I am recommending that we listen to the National Council and so many others and employ a thoughtful approach to eliminating sub-minimum wage for people with disabilities.

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This bill would have the very negative and unintended consequence of actually decreasing current employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This bill, in its present form, violates the fundamental tenets of public policy for individuals with disabilities – self-determination, informed choice, and person-centered planning.

I appeal to you, members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, to consider that the individuals with disabilities are citizens who have the right to live, work and contribute at all capacities with dignity and respect. Let's use a planful approach as NCD recommends to ensure that workers with disabilities successfully *achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society.*

We thank you for your time and attention.

Hannah Jurewicz
Senior Director