



March 16, 2015

To: Senate Workforce Committee

From: Ross Ryan, Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition

RE: Support People with Disabilities to Work in Their Communities

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Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ross Ryan. Today I speak on behalf the Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition (OSAC) which is a statewide organization made up of 18 local self-advocacy groups. We bring self-advocates together to speak with one voice on issues that are important to us. Employment is important to us so we can work and earn a pay check because we believe in equal and basic rights for people with disabilities.

It is important for people with disabilities to work in their communities so they can contribute to the community like everyone else. It also proves that people with disabilities are employable.

Communities are better when people with disabilities work alongside everyone else. It shows that people with disabilities can do the same jobs and have the same skills as other people. We are the same as other people, we might have different support needs, but we can do the work.

I have a job as a paid advocate for the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities. As part of my job, I attend stakeholder and advocacy meetings. I am also on several policy committees. In fact, the Governor just appointed me to the Oregon Medicaid Advisory Committee. My fellow committee members value my input because I provide a perspective that other people may not think about.

I used to work in a sheltered workshop. When I worked there, I did not make much money. Half the time, we did not have enough work to do. Sometimes we had to wait a week before there was any work to do.

In sheltered workshops, some people with disabilities are paid less than minimum wage because they have a disability. This policy treats people with disabilities like they are lower than everyone else. It makes me feel like I am a second class citizen. Why would my time and work be valued less than someone without a disability?

Now that I have a job in the community, I am paid more than minimum wage. This is important to me so I can be independent. Making more than minimum wage lets me live like a regular citizen. I can have money to socialize with my friends, go on vacation and have the lifestyle I want to have.

I use some employment supports to help me do my job. My job coach, Josh, helps me with transportation, setting my meetings on my calendar, preparing for meetings, and taking notes. These supports help me be successful as an advocate.

Although I already have a job, if I were talking to an employer, I would tell them that their company would benefit if they hired me as an advocate. I have experience doing the job. I am dependable and stay on task. I have the skills, supports, references and passion to be successful. Just treat me the same way you want to be treated.