



April 30, 2015

To: House Committee on Revenue

From: Ross Ryan, Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition

RE: Support HB 2239 as amended to extend tax credit to employers hiring youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities

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Chair Barnhart 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 young people with disabilities to work so they can be part of their community and be proud of what they are doing. Working also teaches young people that it is important to make your own living. Having a job can also inspire youth with disabilities to be more independent and create connections in the community.

When I was under age 18, I worked at a garden center. I watered plants, unloaded planter boxes and swept the floor. I earned minimum wage.

This job was really important because it taught me that I liked working in my community. I also liked earning money so I could do what I wanted to do. The job taught me that I could be independent, responsible and dependable.

I had to ride public transportation to get to work. Because of this job, I learned that I could get around my community using public transportation.

Some of my friends did not work in high school. They did not learn to be independent like I did.

My advice to young people with developmental disabilities is that they should get a job. When you have a job, you have money to do what you want and you can be more independent.

My advice to employers is that they should hire young people with disabilities so they can have the opportunity to show employers that people with disabilities can work and be a part of the community.

Creating an incentive for employers to hire young people with disabilities is a good idea because it could make more employers hire people with disabilities. Once employers hire people with disabilities, they will know that people with disabilities can work like everyone else.

To Chair Barnhart, Vice Chair Berger and members of the House Revenue Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer remarks on House Bill 2239 and my support for ensuring that youth with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD) are included in the definition of “at risk” or “disadvantaged” youth.

I have spent the majority of my life professionally and personally engaging with youth and adults who experience mental, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, and as the Director of Supported Employment with Community Access Services in Portland metro, I have seen firsthand the multitudes of benefits that result from being employed.

For any working-age individual, we can see that employment brings about a fuller life, a sense of belonging, personal and professional contact, income and the other benefits of earning a wage. Individuals experiencing IDD face significant barriers to employment, indicated by a staggering 86% unemployment rate. Similarly, many youth we commonly refer to as “at-risk” or “disadvantaged” face high unemployment rates, and similar struggles to maintain employment.

Former Governor Kitzhaber recently authorized an executive order to extend employment-focused services for youth with IDD to as young as 14, and it would make sense to extend HB 2239’s impact to this population. For professionals in our field who identify community jobs, having this tax incentive as a negotiation tool can be very effective. Business owners who believe in providing work experience to community youth are still taking a chance on meeting their bottom line, and this incentive will be helpful and provide extra security. Parents and teachers of young people with IDD are finding optimism and encouragement that their child or student will have access to employment experiences through the state’s increased commitment to better serve this population. HB 2239 can provide another positive step in this direction.

Though I only have access to read the bill summary, I would also like to suggest that this tax credit is available to businesses when they employ an individual at a rate that indicates the employee is working at least 8 hours per week at minimum wage. This would ensure that all the youth covered with this bill are gaining valuable and meaningful work experience.

Thank you very much for considering my remarks, and thank you for all the great work that has already been done in this session.

Most Sincerely,

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