

May 6, 2019

To: House Business and Labor Committee

From: Gabrielle Guedon, Executive Director, Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition

RE: Support for SB 494A Ending Subminimum Wage and Paying Oregonians with Disabilities Minimum Wage and Above.

Chair Barker and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gabrielle Guedon and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition. I would like to say thank you for letting me share my story today in support of ending subminimum wage under SB 494A.

When I was finishing high school in Southeast Portland, I went to Vocational Rehabilitation for help in finding a job. Voc. Rehab determined I was too disabled to work. This was devastating and left me feeling depressed and hopeless.

After my second attempt at VR again resulted in me being told I was too disabled to work, out of desperation I went to a sheltered workshop. While at the workshop, I received pennies for products. This means you could work hard all day and still get a paycheck for less than \$20 a day. Actually, being paid \$20 would be a good day, many people often made less than that.

My job included stapling, packaging and putting together nuts and bolts kits for hardware stores. I also put together travel-sized toiletry kits and I would relabel these packages for Fred Meyers and other stores.

I felt that pay showed little regard to the people that were doing it. I knew I could do better than not getting paid fairly and feeling disrespected. I used to go to the bench in the lunch area to cry as I didn't feel valued nor a part of the community. It was one of the darkest times of my life.

My goals were to work in the community and be part of the community. I didn't want to just be around people with disabilities. I wanted to be a part of my community and feel like I was making a difference. When I was in the workshop, I

was in process of trying to find a way to buy a house so that I could move out of my mom's house, pay my own bills and accomplish my dreams of being independent.

To try to reach these goals, I went back to Voc. Rehab for a 3rd time. This time, I finally found a VR counselor who believed in me and helped me to find a job at Lexi Dog as a dog day care attendant, which paid a little above minimum wage.

By having the confidence after being above minimum wage, I was able to gain skills to move up into a career that best fit my skills and interests. After Lexi Dog, I got a job at Community Vision as a Community Outreach Specialist. Both of these jobs helped me to find my current job as an Executive Director of a non-profit organization that fights for what I believe in and focuses on what people can accomplish.

Since leaving my subminimum wage job, I have been able to hold down multiple jobs that paid well over minimum wage. I have gotten my driver's license and bought myself a car. I was able to get off food stamps. I am looking forward to the day I am able to make enough money to pay my own health care. I was also able to buy my own home. It is a small house and it has not been easy but I am proud of myself.

I feel that I have been able to accomplish many of my goals by being paid minimum wage or higher. I know that phasing out the practice of paying people with disabilities less than minimum wage will help many others who were in a place like I was. I ask you to support the phase out of paying people with disabilities subminimum wages to help them achieve their goals. I hope the future generations of people with disabilities will not be valued as second-class citizens but instead as valued, contributing members of their communities.

Thank you again for your time and letting me testify on this issue.