

Ending subminimum wages for people with disabilities

HB 1706. Sponsored by Representatives [Frame](#), [Sells](#), [Macri](#), [Doglio](#), [Gregerson](#), [Riccelli](#), [Callan](#), [Jinkins](#), [Goodman](#), [Valdez](#), [Bergquist](#), [Kloba](#), [Pollet](#)

SUBMINIMUM WAGES DON'T PAY. As public policy, subminimum wages cost tax payers more and marginalize people with disabilities. The laws allowing them date to the 1930s and led to sheltered workshops where people with disabilities were not only segregated, they were paid pennies on the dollar, often at taxpayer expense. In today's Washington – where sheltered workshops have been mostly phased out – subminimum wages subject people with disabilities to discrimination in the workplace and undercut their earning potential.



WHICH IS BETTER? 87% OR 1%? Research and real-world experience both tell us that with the right job match and tailored supports, even people with the most significant support needs can work successfully in competitive, integrated employment at minimum wage or higher. “Competitive and integrated” just means a normal job in a normal workplace, alongside co-workers who do not have disabilities.

Nationally, only 19 percent of people with developmental disabilities who use supported employment services are supported in integrated settings. In Washington, 87 percent are. In some states, as few as 1 percent are. For years now, our public policy focus has been to help people find the right job and follow up with training specific to that job. We don't rely on subminimum wages for jobs in the community. And this policy works: Last fall, 73 percent of people getting non-sheltered, supported employment services had a paying job in an integrated setting. About 60 percent were already earning minimum wage or higher. We lead the nation in this area.

THE REAL ISSUE? BAD JOB MATCHES. Subminimum wages are set by productivity tests, in which people with disabilities are paid based on a percentage of what a “normal” person would produce. No other employees are subject to this test; the presence of disabilities is presumed to hinder job performance. The real issue with job performance, though, is job *suitability*. This is true for everyone. If someone is in the wrong job, they aren't going to thrive. Rather than place people in jobs they aren't suited to, we should help them find a good match.

TAXPAYERS PAY MORE TO SEGREGATE: Subminimum wages are most often used in sheltered workshops. Studies show these are not environments that people with disabilities seek out or prefer, regardless of the level of disability. And yet, tax payer money is often used to subsidize these settings. Instead of investing in job matches and training for jobs in the community, employment support funds are used to operate sheltered workshops. The same money, when invested in community options, RETURNS MORE to the taxpayers. A study of rehabilitation cases from 2002 to 2007 found that for every \$1 invested into supported employment, \$1.46 was returned to taxpayers. When people earn more, they spend more.

CIVIL RIGHTS. Subminimum wages don't pay. And they don't align with civil rights advancements. Washington's law allowing subminimum wages dates to 1959. It predates the Americans with Disabilities Act and other civil rights law. When it passed, schools could refuse to educate people with disabilities. Allowing subminimum wages allows employers to treat people with disabilities differently. No class of employees should be marginalized, and minimum wage protections should be just that. Protections. For everyone.

Supporting organizations for ending subminimum wages for people with disabilities include self-advocacy groups, employment providers for people with disabilities, and community organizations across the state:

Able Opportunities, Inc.
Allies in Advocacy
Alpha Supported Living Services
American Association of People with Disabilities
The Arc of King County
The Arc of Snohomish County
The Arc of Washington
Artist Coalition for Equitable Development
ASUW Middle Eastern Student Commission
ASUW Student Disability Commission
AtWork!
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
Bellingham Deaf and Disability Justice Collective
Building Changes
Cafe Red
Cascade Connections
Cascadia Deaf Nation
Centerforce
City of Spokane
Community Employment Alliance
Community Residential Services Association
Community to Community Development
Creative Justice
D2 Neighborhood Action Council
D3 Neighborhood Action Council
D4 Neighborhood Action Council
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Disability Rights Washington
Downtown Emergency Service Center
Ed Wiley Autism Acceptance Lending Library
Eleanor Elizabeth Institute for Black Empowerment
Foundation for Divergent Minds
Geeks Without Bounds
Human Rights Watch
Martin Luther King County Labor Council
Morningside
National Council on Independent Living
National Federation of the Blind of Washington
Northwest Access Fund
Not Dead Yet
Open Doors for Multicultural Families
PAVE (Partnerships for Action Voices for Empowerment)
People First of Bellingham/Whatcom
People First of Clarkston
People First of King County
People First of Lake Roosevelt
People First of Snohomish County
People First of Washington
Public Defender Association
Puget Sound Regional Services
Queer the Land
Restaurant Opportunities Center Seattle (ROC-Seattle)
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC-United)
Ryther
Seattle Disability Commission
Seattle Human Rights Commission
Seattle Immigrant & Refugee Commission
Seattle Labor Standards Advisory Commission
Seattle LGBTQ Commission
Seattle Women's Commission
Seattle Youth Commission
SEIU 925
SEIU 1199NW
Self-Advocates in Leadership
Service Alternatives
Sherwood Community Services
Socialist Alternative
Supported Solution
TASH
Third Place Design Co-operative
Total Living Concept
Trillium Employment Services
UFCW 21
Volunteers of America Western Washington
Washington ADAPT West
Washington APSE
Washington CAN
Washington Developmental Disabilities Council
Washington Low Income Housing Alliance
Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO
WISE
Working Washington
Work Opportunities

This handout was prepared by The Arc of King County. The effort was led by people with disabilities from across organizations. We thank everyone for their support!

