

# 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% SUCCESS, 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.

In Washington, we lead the nation with an 87 percent employment rate of people with developmental disabilities who receive employment services. We do this by helping people find the right job and follow up with training specific to that job. In states that rely on subminimum wages to spur employment, as few as 1 percent of people with developmental disabilities who are receiving employment supports are competitively employed in integrated settings.

**THE REAL ISSUE? BAD JOB MATCHES.** Subminimum wages are set by productivity tests. 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.

**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  
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  
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  
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)  
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

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