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**The Arc of Illinois Testimony  
Senate Human Services Committee  
November 12, 2019**

Thank you for hosting this subject matter hearing on employment for people with disabilities and subminimum wage. We appreciate the effort to gather information about the scope, participants and process of subminimum wage and sheltered work in Illinois. This will help Illinois to make thoughtful policy decisions about working to move more people with disabilities into competitive integrated employment.

**The Arc of Illinois believes people with disabilities should receive a fair wage for work. It is time as a state that we move towards equality in pay for all people.** In order to achieve this goal, Illinois must adequately fund services and supports to transition people out of subminimum, ensure that people with diverse abilities and support needs are able to find work in the community and support community organizations to transition to new services. Without additional funding and regulatory change, we will not achieve the justice that people with disabilities, families and community organizations are working to reach.

A lot of fear surrounds this issue – change for individuals, families and providers. As a diverse statewide coalition, the Arc of Illinois continues to bring together key stakeholders to talk about what needs to happen to ensure people have the rights and opportunities to gain employment.

**Data Collection** - As a state, we need to improve the data we collect and analyze about sheltered work including increasing the understanding, transparency and tracking of the number of people and length of employment through sheltered work, locations, hours, and pay rates. We must review person centered plans to determine if we as a system are capturing people's work goals consistently and implementing them effectively.

**Transition Plan** - We believe there needs to be a robust transition plan away from subminimum wage. We want to ensure that this plan is funded, and Illinois expands capacity in the community to support the 13,000 people currently in sheltered work. The plan should establish clear goals and benchmarks for employment for people with I/DD in Illinois and track transition age youth to ensure they are receiving the appropriate support to move to integrated employment. It should be person centered in its approach, which should include creating individualized transitions plans for each person that reflects their interests. Illinois must commit to fully implement the Employment First Task Force recommendations. The state must advocate for federal changes that will encourage employment while protecting access to critical benefits.

Specific actions should include the following:

**Data & Goal Setting**

- Track and report on current data about those who participate in subminimum wage on a quarterly basis;
- Establish clear goals or benchmarks for employment for people with I/DD in Illinois;
- Track transition age youth to ensure they are receiving the appropriate support to move to integrated employment;

- Fully implement the Employment First Task Force recommendations;

### **Increased funding/rates**

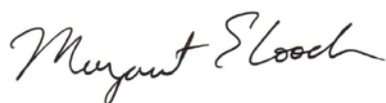
- Create and FUND individual transition plans to transition those currently in workshops. We hope that DHS can work in partnership with the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities and other sister agencies on this effort;
- Fund more vocational rehabilitation spots and customized employment through DRS, specifically focused on working with people with the most significant support needs currently in sheltered work;
- Increase rates for supported employment and integrated community day through DDD and review regulations for community day programs to foster flexibility and innovation;
- Develop and fund internships, job shadowing and other opportunities to expose people currently in subminimum wage to community employment;
- Fund service providers with 14c certificates to transition those services to competitive employment or inclusive community day programming. Create a working groups of service providers who are making the transition to be able to problem solve on an ongoing basis and quickly address issues.

### **Eliminate Barriers to Employment**

- Extend the length of time that people with I/DD are able to receive services from DRS, expand funding for job developers; restructure the DRS payment plan to address the upfront costs of supporting people to find jobs;
- Create new flexible, entrepreneurial employment options for individuals with a range of abilities or significant support needs to ensure that all people who want to work can, including microbusinesses;
- Review the state use contracting system to incent the use of minimum wage through contracts as the state should be the leader in encouraging competitive employment;
- Raise the personal needs allowance and review the policy that requires ½ of a person's earnings to go to service providers/the state for services, which is a strong disincentive to work;
- Work with the Illinois Congressional Delegation to address caps in earnings and assets that can impact benefits such as SSI, SSDI and Medicaid;
- Address transportation and other regional barriers;
- Ensure that transition age youth are supported into competitive integrated employment only;

We look forward to working with policy makers and advocates to ensure that Illinois can fulfill its commitment to Employment First and support equality for all through a transition away from subminimum wage. We look forward to working to encourage inclusive employment and meaningful day experiences so that all people, regardless of abilities or support needs are able to contribute through work and other activities. I am happy to share further our vision. You can reach me at 773-558-5136 or [meg@thearcofil.org](mailto:meg@thearcofil.org).

Sincerely,



Meg Cooch  
Executive Director  
The Arc of Illinois

*Achieve with us.*