



November 16, 2021

Senator Steve Daines  
320 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Daines:

Disability Rights Montana (DRM) and National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) would like to thank you for introducing the *Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act*. DRM and NDRN have long advocated for an elimination of subminimum wages and segregated employment for people with disabilities. Research has consistently shown that full employment of people with disabilities is not only possible, but also probable, if individuals are provided the supports and services they need. We should be pursuing every path possible to support people with disabilities who want to work for a competitive wage.

NDRN is the voluntary membership association for Protection & Advocacy (P&A) and Client Assistance Program (CAP) agencies. The P&A and CAP agencies are a nationwide network of congressionally mandated, cross disability organizations operating in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands). There is also a P&A and CAP affiliated with the Native American Consortium, which includes the Hopi, Navajo, and San Juan Southern Paiute Nations located in the Four Corners region of the Southwest.

Disability Rights Montana is the designated protection and advocacy system for the State of Montana. We received that designation in 1977 from then Governor, Thomas L. Judge. Each year our staff provides statewide services to approximately 1200 Montanans with disabilities. Our services include training, advocacy, and legal services.

Sub-minimum wages perpetuate a life of poverty and dependency for people with disabilities, and they run contrary to the national priority of competitive integrated employment. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 established as a priority competitive integrated employment, where people with disabilities work in mainstream jobs alongside, and are paid comparable wages to, co-workers without disabilities. WIOA also furthers the goal of the Americans with

Disabilities Act to advance the economic self-sufficiency of people with disabilities. It is past time that we put an end to the outdated and unfair practice of paying sub-minimum wages. The Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act is a clear and logical next step in the progression towards fulfilling Congress's mandate to support fully integrated, competitive employment for people with disabilities.

There are approximately sixteen sheltered workshops in Montana which are legally allowed to pay people with disabilities less than .20 per hour. DRM is working with community partners to end sheltered workshops and sub-minimum wage in Montana. DRM advocates for transition programs that provide person-centered supports and services to people with disabilities to prepare to obtain and maintain meaningful competitive integrated employment. DRM believes that ending sheltered workshops that pay sub-minimum wages is a critical step towards building more inclusive communities within Montana.

Again, DRM and NDRN applaud you for introducing this important piece of legislation, and we are excited to work with you to enact this bill into law. Please contact Cyrus Huncharek, Senior Public Policy Analyst, at [cyrus.huncharek@ndrn.org](mailto:cyrus.huncharek@ndrn.org) or me at [bernie@disabilityrightsmt.org](mailto:bernie@disabilityrightsmt.org) should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Bernie Franks-Ongoy  
Executive Director, Disability Rights Montana



Curtis L. Decker  
Executive Director, National Disability Rights Network