

Committees:

Arts, Athletics, & Tourism, **Ranking Member**

Finance

Insurance

Rules and Reference

Office: 614-466-5345

Email: Rep01@ohiohouse.gov



Representative Dontavius L. Jarrells
Assistant Minority Leader
Ohio House District 1

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally, and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 225, the Ohio Employment First and Greater Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act, which I am proud to jointly sponsor with my colleague, Representative Tom Young.

This bipartisan legislation is about dignity. It's about economic opportunity. And it's about making sure every Ohioan, **regardless of ability**, has the right to fair wages and the chance to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Currently, Ohio law allows certain employers to pay people with disabilities less than the minimum wage. This system, rooted in Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, a provision dating back to 1938, was created under the guise of opportunity, but in practice, it has marginalized, excluded, and devalued people for generations. House Bill 225 seeks to change that by phasing out sub-minimum wage over five years and realigning our systems with modern values and best practices.

We didn't craft this legislation in a vacuum. After extensive consultation with constituents, provider agencies, and families, we identified three core principles that serve as the foundation of this bill:

1. A clear and responsible phase-out of sub-minimum wages, paired with a comprehensive shift to Employment First, meaning that community-based, integrated employment becomes the preferred outcome for all Ohioans with disabilities.
2. A deep focus on enhancing the quality of those employment outcomes, not just finding jobs, but ensuring that people earn good wages, work meaningful hours, and access a diverse range of job opportunities in line with their skills and aspirations.
3. An unflinching rejection of the idea that habilitation or segregated facilities are acceptable alternatives. We refuse to trade one form of exclusion for another.

House Bill 225 also strengthens and expands the role of the Employment First Task Force, which will play a central role in assisting employers with the transition. This Task Force will review employer plans, align services with national standards, and identify strategies to improve both employment and health outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities.

This bill establishes a coordinated, thoughtful transition toward personalized, supportive employment for Ohioans with physical and intellectual disabilities. Under the bill, employers holding a sub-minimum wage certificate, whether state or federal, must submit a transition plan within 15 months. These employers will receive direct support from the Department of Developmental Disabilities and the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency as they move toward competitive, integrated

employment models. Throughout the five-year transition period, the state will gather, monitor, and publicly report progress to ensure transparency and accountability.

And here's where the business case meets the moral one.

House Bill 225 includes a nonrefundable 15% tax credit for businesses and individuals who purchase goods or services from certified nonprofits that employ people with disabilities in integrated settings and offer health insurance benefits. Employers who employ those with physical and intellectual disabilities often see higher retention, stronger workplace morale, and increased productivity.

Together, we can send a clear message: if you invest in people with disabilities, Ohio will invest in you.

And, Ohio is not alone in this effort. Sixteen states have already legislated or initiated the phase-out of sub-minimum wages. Texas and Washington have ended their 14(c) contracts. Alabama, the District of Columbia, Vermont, and Wyoming currently have no active 14(c) certificates. The momentum is real, and Ohio has an opportunity to lead.

Just last year, the Northern District of Ohio awarded back pay and damages to three individuals with disabilities who were unlawfully paid sub-minimum wages, affirming what the U.S. Department of Labor concluded in 2016: disability alone is not a justification for lower wages.

As I begin to close, I want to personally thank the hundreds of people with physical and intellectual disabilities I've spoken to about the transition away from sub-minimum wage. While it's policy to us, for each and every one of them, it's personal. In every corner of our state, there are individuals who dream of working, of building something, of buying groceries or a birthday present for their loved ones with the money they earned themselves.

This bill affirms those dreams.

Thank you Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally, and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee for your attention to this important legislation.

It's now my honor to turn it over to my joint sponsor, Representative Young.