

March 24th, 2022

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The Honorable Jim, Himes
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative

As constituents and occupational therapy students, we are writing to ask you to support the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (S.3238/H.R.2373). This would assist employers providing employment under special certificates in remodeling their business to a system that supports individuals with disabilities through competitive integrated employment.

S.3238/H.R.2373 would prohibit and phase-out special or 14(c) certificates ending subminimum wage for workers with disabilities. It would also establish a technical assistance center and provide grants to states or employers to help them transition to competitive integrated employment.

As occupational therapists, we promote the capability of all individuals to participate in meaningful everyday activities. Our role as practitioners is to address many of the barriers to independence experienced by people with disabilities, including those that surround the occupation of work. We are educated to teach employment skills through the use of interventions, such as prompting strategies, group skills training and practice, environmental modifications, and technology training. We are advocating for occupational justice through this act to promote occupational engagement in meaningful and productive life roles toward population health.

The Department of Labor reports an estimated 100,000 people in the United States are paid subminimum wage. This is primarily due to a provision in the Fair Labor Standards Act that permits employers to receive special certificates from the U.S. Department of Labor to pay a subminimum wage to people with disabilities. A 2020 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report found that between the years of 2017 and 2018, the average wage of a person working under such certificates was only \$3.34 per hour which is less than half of the federal minimum wage.

People with disabilities want to work, live independently and be able to pay their own bills. The information presented illustrates how challenging that is to achieve given the current limitations. Congress has the opportunity to help individuals with disabilities achieve financial independence. Every American deserves to be paid a fair wage. Please support S.1578/H.R.3150 to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.