



Nothing about us without us!

May 18, 2017

Senator Patty Murray
Senator Bernie Sanders
Representative Bobby Scott
Representative Keith Ellison
Via Electronic Mail

Dear Senator Murray, Senator Sanders, Representative Scott, and Representative Ellison:

On behalf of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), I write to communicate our support for the Raise the Wage Act. ASAN, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, is the leading nationwide advocacy organization run by and for autistic people ourselves. We advocate for greater inclusion and respect for all autistic individuals. We advocate for policies and laws that support and empower autistic people and that support our full inclusion and equality as citizens. Our motto is "Nothing About Us Without Us!"

Hundreds of thousands of workers with disabilities are still paid less than the minimum wage.

2018 will mark the 80th anniversary of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which created a federal minimum wage. However, when the FLSA passed in 1938, it included a loophole that enabled employers to pay people with disabilities a mere fraction of the minimum wage.

Nearly eighty years later, people with disabilities continue to suffer as a result of this archaic and discriminatory loophole. Some employers are paying workers with disabilities, including autistic workers, only pennies an hour.

This form of wage discrimination keeps workers with disabilities in extreme poverty. It provides employers with financial incentives not to provide reasonable accommodations that would increase our productivity and earning capacity, despite the fact that these accommodations are required under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Raise the Wage Act will end this discriminatory practice. Workers with disabilities who currently are paid less than minimum wage will see an immediate increase in their hourly wages, followed by periodic increases until they reach the new, universal minimum wage of \$15 per hour. This will help millions of workers with disabilities transition out of poverty and begin earning a fair wage.

Workers with disabilities and their supporters cannot get by while earning the current federal minimum wage.

Many of the workers who currently earn the federal minimum wage are either individuals with disabilities or people who are paid to support individuals with disabilities, such as home health aides and accessible transportation providers. Like other workers earning the federal minimum wage, people with disabilities and our paid supporters cannot get by on \$7.25 per hour. The extremely low minimum wage has made it difficult to find qualified supporters to help us live in the community.

Low wages are a major reason why so many people with disabilities and our supporters are unable to escape poverty. It contributes to the epidemic of homelessness and housing insecurity among people with disabilities, including workers with disabilities. And when our paid supporters are forced to go without groceries or cannot afford gas, we also suffer.

By increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15.00 per hour by 2024, the Raise the Wage Act would help promote the financial security of people with disabilities and ensure our access to adequate support. The Raise the Wage Act would also ensure that the minimum wage is automatically adjusted in keeping with median wage increases, which will ensure continued access to livable wages.

Tipped wages hurt workers with disabilities.

Under current law, certain tipped workers can earn as little as \$2.13 per hour. Because these workers cannot earn a living wage without tips, workers with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to disability-based discrimination by customers. Because of our disability, autistic people are often misperceived as clumsy, slow, or standoffish, which can lead to withholding of tips. Autistic tipped workers must therefore either disclose their disability to every customer, or run the risk of not earning anything close to a living wage.

By eliminating loopholes for tipped workers, the Raise the Wage Act will help ensure that autistic workers and other workers with disabilities earn a consistent wage that is comparable to that of their coworkers. This will reduce the degree to which disabled tipped workers' financial security is subject to the potentially discriminatory whims of others.

We urge you to move the Raise the Wage Act forward. For more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at scrane@autisticadvocacy.org.

Sincerely,



Sam Crane
Legal Director, Autistic Self Advocacy Network