



**The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc.**  
*Protecting the Legal and Civil Rights of Students with Disabilities and their Families*

May 15, 2017

Ranking Member Murray, Senator Sanders, Ranking Member Scott and Representative Ellison:

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA) is an independent, nonprofit organization of parents, attorneys, advocates, and related professionals who work to protect the civil rights and secure excellence in education on behalf of the 6.4 million children with disabilities in America. COPAA's mission is to serve as a national voice for special education rights and is grounded in the belief that every child deserves the right to a quality education that prepares him or her for meaningful employment, higher education and lifelong learning.

We write in support of key provisions in the *Raise the Wage Act* which seek to eliminate, within seven years, the discriminatory practice of allowing employers to pay employees a subminimum wage. COPAA's position is that employees with disabilities must be paid a fair wage for fair labor. We understand that the issue is complex and that a change such as this will likely impact the training and employment system. We also acknowledge that employment will and should vary for each individual employee, however, we know that historically, youth and young adults with disabilities too often face limited, one-track and discriminatory employment options as compared to their peers. This year, about 195,000 people with disabilities are working for subminimum wages in over 2400 companies across the U.S.<sup>i</sup> COPAA wants this discriminatory practice to end.<sup>ii</sup>

The *Raise the Wage Act* takes a crucial step forward and moves the nation in a positive direction for employees, especially those working for subminimum wages. The bill offers a tiered approach to providing the same minimum wage for all employees. This provision is especially encouraging and is particularly relevant to transition-age youth with significant disabilities who are preparing to exit special education, access adult services and participate more fully in the community. It's imperative that all youth have access to both the training and the jobs that will lead to a living wage so that they can achieve an independent, community-centered and quality life.

COPAA urges the Senate to support progress in federal policy that eliminates barriers to meaningful work and meaningful pay for individuals with disabilities. We look forward to working with you to achieve a positive result so that every working individual receives fair pay for fair labor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise Marshall".

Denise Marshall  
Executive Director

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (2017). Wage and Hour Division Certificate Holders data file. Retrieved at: <https://www.dol.gov/whd/specialemployment/>

<sup>ii</sup> Title II of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12132 (2006), as interpreted by *Olmstead v. L.C. by Zimring*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999), requires that services, programs, and activities provided by public entities, including States, be delivered in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of persons with disabilities. *Olmstead* is particularly relevant to transition-age youth with significant disabilities who are preparing to exit special education settings and access adult services and participate more fully in the community.