



DATE: 4-30-21

SUBJ: Tom Knost, Senior Director of Activities, Employment, and Home and Community Support Services, Continuum of Colorado: Testimony SB 21-039 (SMW)

My name is Tom Knost and I am the Director of Activities, Employment and Home and Community Support Services at Continuum of Colorado. Continuum currently provides employment supports to 110 people with IDD in the Denver metro area. I am here to provide the perspective of an employer that has recently transitioned away from sub-minimum wage employment.

We completed this transition in 2017 because we felt it was the right thing to do for the people we served, and we saw that the national and state trends were headed in this direction. It was a challenging process for us, as we had to restructure our programs for the change. When we made our decision, we gave ourselves a little over a year to restructure our programs and make the transition. As a result of this short timeline, we were successful transitioning 11 individuals we supported, about half, to competitive jobs. Out of the remaining 13 people, some moved to other providers who still did sub-minimum wage, and others decided to utilize our non-work day services instead. I understand that other providers who have transitioned had a bit better success, but I'm not aware of anyone who had 100% success due to the systemic barriers that you've heard about today.

I was part of the committee that created this bill concept, and I believe that if the additional services in this bill had been in place when we made this transition, and we allowed ourselves more time, we would have had a lot more success finding people competitive jobs. These service enhancements, along with the four-year phase-out timeline and the expansion of the Medicaid Buy-In,

are critical to ensuring that the elimination of sub-minimum wage employment doesn't result in people losing the opportunity to pursue employment. As a member of the Employment First Advisory Partnership, I look forward to the additional recommendations we'll be making to further ensure the success of people who want to work.

Today, we are proud of our employment programs, and we continue to strive to provide supports aligned with best employment practices. We know that the services in the bill will help not only those who are currently in sub-minimum wage jobs, but also those who are not currently pursuing employment.