



## **Testimony of Heather Sachs, NDSC Policy & Advocacy Director**

### **U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

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My name is Heather Sachs, and I am the Policy & Advocacy Director for the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC), the country's oldest and largest national organization for people with Down syndrome, their families, and the professionals who work with them. NDSC provides information, advocacy and support across the lifespan, and works to create a national climate in which all people will recognize and embrace the value and dignity of people with Down syndrome.

NDSC believes that all individuals with Down syndrome should have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. Like so many other disability organizations, NDSC views Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act as outdated, discriminatory, and reinforcing a life of poverty, segregation, and dependency on public support for people with disabilities. We support phasing out 14(c) in a responsible way along with capacity-building for competitive integrated employment. To that end, NDSC is an active member of the Collaboration to Promote Self-Determination (CPSD) and is advocating for the passage of the Transformation to Competitive Employment Act (HR 873/S. 260).

Employment should be an expected life activity for individuals with Down syndrome, and they should have the individual and systemic supports necessary to enable them to find, keep and succeed in careers in the community based on their preferences, interests, and strengths.

We recognize that change isn't easy, and that there are some in our community who are content with their current placements in sheltered workshops and are reluctant to make the transition. Therefore, NDSC advocates for laws and policies that will build infrastructure and transition supports needed to phase out the issuance of subminimum wage certificates while increasing opportunities for competitive integrated employment and putting in place safeguards to protect the interests of any people affected by this shift.

You've heard from policy experts all day long. I want to use my remaining time to lift up some of the voices of self-advocates and their families in the Down syndrome community.

Tara, a mom of an adult son with Down syndrome from Iowa, shares that her son is an example of how people often get trapped in sheltered workshops because the resources to support them in competitive integrated employment may not yet be available. She explains that her son Taylor has the potential to work in the community but would need job coaching (like so many other people with disabilities who are successfully working). Obtaining this job coaching has been nearly impossible due to resource shortfalls so he is stuck in a sheltered workshop in the meantime. Tara believes that phasing out 14(c), putting more resources into the waivers that provide job coaching assistance and helping workshops convert to CIE will enable people like Taylor to achieve their full potential in the workforce.

Rachel, a self-advocate with Down syndrome from Kansas who works in a restaurant says, "it makes my heart sad that some of my friends cannot have jobs that allow them to make money like their friends."

Cindy, a mom of a young daughter with Down syndrome from California, writes, "I believe that subminimum wage is un-American...we have to move away from it because it ultimately keeps our kids in the spin-cycle of poverty and dependency."

People with Down syndrome are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as the rest of us. Segregating them in sheltered workshops and paying them pennies on the dollar diminishes their self-worth and dignity. As Cindy from California says, Section 14(c) is simply "un-American."