

## MEDIA RELEASE

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**MISSOULA, MT. November 30, 2021** -- “No one should be paid less than minimum wage simply because they have a disability,” said Martin Blair, Executive Director of the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities at the University of Montana. Blair was referring to the bi-partisan, Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (TCIEA) introduced last week in the U.S. Senate by Montana’s Senator Steve Daines and Pennsylvania’s Senator Bob Casey. Daines and Casey are leading a national effort to end employment discrimination against people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The bill will support employers transitioning to paying competitive, fair wages to people with disabilities.

“We appreciate Senator Daines’ bipartisan leadership to ensure that every person, regardless of disability, has the right to be paid a fair wage for a day’s work. Sub-minimum wages perpetuate a life of poverty and dependency for people with disabilities,” said Bernie Franks-Ongoy, Executive Director of Disability Rights Montana. “This bill helps employers build services and supports so that people with complex disabilities can be successful in competitive, integrated jobs,” added Blair. In Montana, this means that hundreds of adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities will participate more fully in their communities. Across the U.S., the TCIEA opens the competitive employment door for an estimated 100,000 adults with disabilities.

“There is dignity and hope in work, so we should be doing all we can to support Americans with disabilities in the workforce, not treat them unfairly. Americans with disabilities should never be paid below the minimum wage,” Senator Daines said.

A 2020 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report found that between 2017 and 2018, the average wage of a person with a disability working under so-called 14(c) certificates was only \$3.34 per hour—less than half of the federal minimum wage. The TCIEA would prohibit the U.S. Secretary of Labor from issuing new certificates and phase out the use of subminimum wage practices for all employers over five years. It would provide grants to states or employers, supporting employers transitioning to a business model that pays at least minimum wage to workers with disabilities. The bill will help them continue to provide services and supports to workers with disabilities, particularly to those who need more supports in the workplace.

There are approximately sixteen sheltered workshops in Montana which are legally

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allowed to pay people with disabilities less than .20 per hour. The Montana Developmental Disabilities Network is working with community partners to end sheltered workshops and sub-minimum wage in Montana.

Montana's federally-funded Developmental Disabilities Network is comprised of the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities, Disability Rights Montana, and the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities. The Network assures that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families have access to needed community services, supports, and other assistance that promotes self-determination and integration in community life.

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