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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Seattle Commission of People with disAbilities Urges City to End Subminimum Wages for Disabled Workers

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SEATTLE –The Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities (hereafter “the Commission”) urges the city to immediately stop granting employers exemptions to the minimum wage for their disabled workers, and to ensure all workers legally paid a subminimum wage be paid a fair wage by the end of the year.

While the city, like the state of Washington and the country as a whole, has a minimum wage law, each of these have exemptions that allow employers to pay a worker with a disability less than that. There are at least 130 disabled workers in the city of Seattle making subminimum wage, most making under \$1.60/hr. The lowest-paid worker under these exemptions in Seattle makes 20 cents an hour.

“Subminimum wages are widely opposed by the disability community but continue because of patronizing ideas from non-disabled providers, politicians, and occasionally parents who insist they know what’s best for us,” Says Shaun Bickley, the Commission’s Employment Chair. Many of those organizations showed up to testify last Thursday, including Marci Carpenter, President of National Federation of the Blind of Washington.

“Paying disabled workers subminimum wages devalues workers and treats us as second-class citizens. Disabled workers pay taxes, raise children, create wealth for our city, serve on city boards and commissions and add much to the diversity and vitality of Seattle.” Says Carpenter, who notes the National Federation of the Blind has a long history of opposing subminimum wage.

The Commission is hopeful the Mayor and City Council will act on these recommendations to redress this city-sponsored wage discrimination. “Seattle made history by being the first major city to win a \$15 minimum wage, with workers and young people pushing back against big business and the politicians that serve them,” Says Councilmember Kshama Sawant, who herself has a Ph.D in Economics. “But corporate politicians shamefully put in loopholes to weaken \$15, including subminimum wages for people with disabilities.”

“At the end of the day, it’s legal discrimination that deprives disabled people from protections that apply to all other workers,” Says Bickley.