

COVER PAGE

Name: [REDACTED]

Status: Other (person with a disability)

Subject: The national minimum wage

As a person with a significant disability, I am reliant on having a PA (personal assistant) to enable me to live in the community and participate actively in society. I and many people with disability have noted with concern that the entrance of for-profit service providers such as Bluebird Care, Comfort Keepers etc, has resulted in downward pressure on PA pay rates and other conditions of employment such as minimal hours of work, sometimes as little as half an hour. It is very damaging to the individual PA in terms of choosing personal assistance as a career. It affects their morale level, incentive to train and to work and commitment. So this downward pressure on pay and conditions for the PA has a very direct impact on the person with a disability. Often, people with disability get allocated a small number of hours, perhaps a couple of hours per day spread out over morning and evening. Recruiting a PA to work for these sorts of hours is increasingly difficult as the pay rate is driven down lower. Even when recruitment is possible, the individual PA is often only taking up the job as a stopgap, perhaps while studying, or seeking other employment with more favourable terms.

The life of a PA may often start at 7 AM in the morning for a couple of hours, another hour at lunchtime and a couple of hours at night, perhaps finishing at 12 AM. For this “day’s work” the PA might only have 4 or 5 hours in total, being paid at the minimum hourly rate. In addition to the low number of hours and rate of pay, in rural settings the PA often has to travel many kilometres between individual people with disability. The for-profit service providers don’t pay travel allowance/mileage allowance for this travel between clients.

As part of a study on zero hour contracts by the University of Limerick, they come up with a very appropriate and reasonable recommendation that an employer would have to give a minimum of 3 (contiguous) hours work to an employee on any given day. As a person with the disability, I would support that in conjunction with a living wage rate of pay.

Other reasons to support the necessity of the living wage rate of pay are the upward pressure on rent, and increasingly difficult housing environment. How can people on the minimum wage even contemplate living in rental accommodation or seeking a mortgage? Employees on the current minimum rate of pay are socially excluded from a housing prospective. A fairer society provides for narrowing the gap between the highest paid and the lowest paid. In Ireland, the gap is increasing, not reducing. A fairer society also provides positive mechanisms and supports to redistribute wealth. Again, Ireland has been progressively moving in the opposite direction. One small step in closing the income gap is to nationally provide for a living wage.

Yet another reason to support the necessity of the living wage rate of pay is that when employees embark on family life and having children, the children of parents on the minimum wage and with unpredictable hours of work are thereby open to the full negative effects of poverty and all of the consequent damage their early childhood life, education, aspirations. A fairer society should provide that all children start life with equal opportunity.

So for all the reasons set out above, I urge the low pay commission to actively advocate for and recommend a living wage rate of pay and also to set minimum hours of work.

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