

State Representative Mah Visits HB Threads to Highlight Inclusive Employment and Fair Pay in Action

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: State Representative Theresa Mah Visits HB Threads to Highlight Inclusive Employment and Fair Pay in Action

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Chicago, IL — State Representative Theresa Mah visited HB Threads, Easterseals Serving

Chicagoland & Greater Rockford's inclusive employment social enterprise today and met with employees, families, and leadership to spotlight HB Threads as a real-time model of fair-wage employment for adults with disabilities.

Rep. Mah, a co-sponsor of Illinois' new *Dignity in Pay Act*, participated in a roundtable discussion with HB Threads employees, staff, and family members, and saw firsthand how the social enterprise provides meaningful jobs that support employees' independence, productivity, and economic inclusion.

HB Threads provides meaningful, fairly paid jobs for adults with disabilities and allows them to thrive. The jobs offer hands-on skill development, and employees produce high-quality custom apparel and products for partners across Illinois including the Chicago White Sox.

During the visit, **Rep. Theresa Mah** said, "Updating the outdated wage system has been years in the making, and the Dignity in Pay Act reflects the work of many partners across Illinois. This legislation is simple: people with disabilities deserve to be paid what they are worth. We built a thoughtful phase-out plan, added incentives and technical assistance, and worked closely with organizations to show that this transition is both manageable and necessary. Seeing HB Threads today brings that vision to life. Your success shows that inclusive, fair-wage employment strengthens workers' independence and demonstrates their important contributions to society. Examples like this helped us move the bill forward, and they will continue to guide Illinois as we implement this important change."

In Illinois, people with disabilities face an unemployment rate more than 50% higher than their peers without disabilities. Since its launch, HB Threads has employed over 150 individuals with disabilities. As Illinois implements the Dignity in Pay Act to phase out sub-minimum wages by 2029, HB Threads is already ahead, ensuring all employees earn above minimum wage today.

HB Threads associates shared how they use their paychecks:

- David Cahill - "I save the money! We go to Thunderbolt and Sox baseball games.
- Jason Harris- Buy groceries for me and my brother and I buy a few things for myself here and there and save whatever I can.
- Terry Bracey- Bills, insurance, food- very practical things. I would maybe spend money on a concert.

Associate David Cahill's mother Lynn Cahill said, "My son David David has been part of HB Threads for nearly 22 years, and he wouldn't be where he is today without this opportunity. Working here, he found a place where he feels safe, valued, and able to thrive. Every Friday he reminds me it's payday and that sense of earning a paycheck and being more self-sufficient means everything to him and to me. As a parent, I've seen how much dignity and pride this job gives him. Not every young person with a disability can work in a busy grocery store or a fast-paced environment, but here he is able to focus, contribute, and succeed. There are so many people like David who could thrive if more organizations opened their doors. These employees show up, work hard, and put their whole hearts into what they do. HB Threads has given David purpose, stability, and a community and I wish more employers could see what is possible."

Leaders at Easterseals welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate how policy can be translated into practice and improve the lives of HB Threads employees.

"At HB Threads, we see every day what's possible when people are given meaningful work and fair pay. Our associates take incredible pride in what they create, and the quality of their work shows it. We're a real production business serving partners across Illinois, and our team proves that inclusion and excellence go hand in hand. We believe that dignity shouldn't wait. HB Threads is proud to show what inclusive employment can look like for businesses across Illinois," said **Korrey Kooistra, Director of HB Threads.**

Learn more about HB Threads: <https://hbthreads.org/>**MEDIA CONTACT:**

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