

Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee.

My name is CJ and I am a Program Coordinator at Benco. I am here to urge you to prioritize full funding for Developmental Disability Services, and more specifically in DSP Wages.

In March of 2020 I lost both my sisters suddenly. They lived across the country. At the time a plane ticket, hotel and rental car would have cost \$1500 dollars. I only make about 1800 dollars a month after taxes. I had \$400 dollars in my savings account and enough sick time to cover a few days. My paycheck and savings would have barely covered the cost of my trip if I did not pay rent. So I had to choose do I pay my rent or do I attend the funeral of my young sisters. It was not really a choice I had as I cannot afford to be homeless. So Instead of taking time off to grief I went to work.

On top of that we were extremely short staffed, and being the Program Coordinator, I was responsible for covering those open hours. We had 160 of them open. The reason we were short staffed? Those staff found higher paying jobs with less responsibilities. It has been a year and I still struggle everyday with the ramifications of work coming before family. I do not have many relatives and the ones I do have stopped talking to me when I choose "work" over "family". They could not understand why I would continue to work for a company with such a low pay scale but this job is not "just a job", and the people I care for are not "a paycheck". They are thoughtful, caring, compassionate, kind, all around wonderful individuals whom need extra care. So when people say ' a job is a job' or it is "just a paycheck" they aren't thinking that paycheck will come between them and something important and they aren't thinking they could harm others by leaving that paycheck in search of a 'bigger better one'. For me, that "paycheck" was the determining factor in whether or not I got to say goodbye to a loved one. That "paycheck" was a determining factor in how I got to grief. That "paycheck" stood between me and getting to share in their final moments. So when we ask ourselves why it is important to raise the wage we have to think about moments like these where we are asking people to choose between their personal and professional lives. We should not have to make grave personal sacrifices just so that we can provide for ourselves and our loved ones.

Please fund disability services to ensure these vulnerable people have the supports they need, when they need them.

Best,  
CJ