Good morning,

I wanted to reach out to you all in hopes to have a more direct connection within our system. I'm hoping to gather some guidance as far as obtaining information about House Bill 2495 and getting some very important questions, answered.
"I am writing to urge the state legislature to ensure that the new acuity-based payment system for Foster care homes that care for adults with exceptional needs should not result in a decrease in funding. As a foster care provider, I have seen firsthand the positive impact that this system has had on the lives of the adults in my care. The acuity-based system should allow us to provide more individualized care and support to those in our care, and should enable us to better meet their needs. I strongly believe that the acuity-based system should meet the highest requirements and that any decrease in funding would be detrimental to the individuals in our care".

As you are all aware, Adult Foster Providers and the I/DD community around the state has experienced some very difficult times over the years and especially during Covid. The issues at hand started long before Covid but have unfortunately been enhanced over the last two. Each issue is subjected a little differently per home since not all of our clients that we serve are the same.

First issue at hand is the lack of staffing resources. The problem is, as you may know, people either don't want to work or the compensation they are seeking is much higher then the $15.21/ hour, which is the current rate paid for exceptional needs respite hours.. Which leads me in to issue number two.

Second issue at hand is a significant one that is a major culprit to the problems providers have experienced not only during Covid but long before. The payment wages that are being offered for respite care(add on payments for exceptional care)is $15.21/hour. With inflation, that amount cannot support employees own current cost of living. After taxes they are taking home roughly $10.61/hour. Respite care clientele deserve to have employees whom are compensated thoughtfully. I understand that these wages have been fought for through the union and the bargaining system they have set up but change needs to happen. That change should enhance the lives of our exceptional needs I/DD community and the people serving them. Which leads me in to third issue.

Third issue at hand is lack of benefits to providers and their employees. Health care benefits, retirement, paid time off(which just recently has been addressed)and vacation pay are not and have never been offered. This is a major problem and causes a huge barrier in trying to hire new employees. I understand that we are considered "partial state employees" but the fact that we are serving such a vulnerable and difficult population leads me to believe that these benefits should

absolutely be offered to us without question.

When the payment system for Adult Foster Care homes changes (by Jan 1st 2024 as stated in house bill 2495) I hope these issues are taken in to full consideration. Any substantial loss of funding will have a huge negative impact on Providers and the community they serve. Thus making an even bigger gap in our states hope to fix our mental health crisis. Exceptional needs person/s and their providers should never feel threatened by loss of funding.

I have devoted my life to serving the I/DD population for that last 20 years, 14 years of which I've had my own home as a provider. These concerns are just the tip of what providers have been dealing with over the years. There must be a way that these issues can be changed. For the sake of the I/DD community, their families and the people serving them.

My questions are:

1.   Will the acuity-based payment method truly compensate the exceptional needs community?
2.   Do you predict a decrease in funding for AFH exceptional needs compared to what they are currently receiving? If so, how do you predict those