

Please support HB 5026!

Direct Support Professionals deserve a living wage!

Please prioritize DD wages and support full funding of IDD services in HB 5026. I am asking that you not only protect your previous investment, but that you continue to help move this workforce out of crisis by supporting HB 2457 - it moves DSP wages to 150% of minimum wage.

Currently, I work as a Fiscal Director at Community Access Services (CAS). We at CAS are a team of more than three hundred Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), Supervisors, and Administrators supporting over one hundred fifty adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I started as a DSP more than 34 years ago, and I've assisted people with intellectual and developmental disabilities my entire life.

When you funded the current rate model during the prior session, DSP compensation rose significantly. Without the increases, we would not have survived the pandemic. I sincerely appreciate your financial assistance, but we must safeguard and improve this investment! Unfortunately, the pandemic and shifting labor market have undermined our success in raising salaries. We still have trouble finding and keeping staff, although providers consistently pay higher wages than what is funded. A car wash down my street is advertising for \$22 per hour! Most of the time, this challenging, meaningful work pays less than jobs at fast-food restaurants. Even if service rate models are fully financed, the costs incorporated into them are substantially behind the current market because existing reimbursements for these services were developed based on cost studies that are now years old.

Here are compelling arguments for why Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) working with individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) deserve to be paid at least 150% of the current minimum wage.

1. DSPs play a crucial role in assisting people with IDD to lead happy and meaningful lives. DSPs assist with personal care and grooming, administering medications, meal preparation, housekeeping, companionship, paying bills, monitoring health conditions, and responding to emergencies. They accompany individuals with IDD to grocery stores and doctor appointments, access public transportation, and assist in participating in community activities. DSPs are needed during hospital stays, helping with personal care, providing emotional support, and communicating with the individual's doctor and medical staff. DSPs must be highly skilled to support people with IDD. They must also comply with Federal and State regulations and laws related to the care of individuals with IDD.
2. DSPs have tremendous high responsibility. They often work one-on-one with individuals with IDD and are responsible for their health and well-being every moment. A DSP must deeply understand the unique needs of each individual's strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and habits. This requires a high level of attention, skill, patience, and emotional intelligence. To prevent burnout and offer excellent assistance to those they serve, DSPs must maintain a healthy work-life balance. DSPs must strike a balance between their personal and professional obligations. Many DSPs are busy with their families, young children, aging parents, and close

friends. While most people worked remotely during the pandemic, Direct Support Professionals had to support people with IDD face-to-face at their homes and in the community!

3. Despite a DSP's work being essential and demanding, they are often paid low wages, making it difficult to make ends meet and may discourage people from pursuing a career in this field. Higher wages would give DSPs more disposable income towards health insurance premiums, copays, and other out-of-pocket medical expenses. This would ensure that they have access to quality health care when needed, which is essential for maintaining their health and well-being. A higher wage will afford DSPs to invest toward their retirement savings for their future and plan for their older years with confidence. The ability to create savings would provide a financial cushion in case of unexpected expenses or emergencies. It is important to note that higher wages would also positively impact the economy as a whole. When workers earn more money, they can purchase more goods and services, which can help to stimulate economic growth and create new jobs.
4. There is currently a DSP shortage. The turnover rate and lack of DSPs are problematic for all providers. Despite the critical and demanding nature of the work, they are often paid wages lower than other jobs with much less responsibility. This has also led many people to discourage pursuing a career in this field. The high turnover rate has caused tremendous disruptions for individuals with IDD who rely on consistent support from familiar care providers. This makes it difficult for individuals with IDD to access the support they need to live fulfilling lives. The DSP shortage will become worse if funding is not increased.

Direct Support Professionals are vital in supporting individuals with IDD. It is crucial DSPs receive fair compensation for their critical and demanding work. A wage increase to 150 percent of the current minimum wage would help to ensure that DSPs can meet their basic needs while providing high-quality support to those they serve. Paying DSPs a higher salary would improve their financial stability and ability to afford work benefits. This would help to ensure that DSPs can maintain their own health and well-being while providing quality support to those they serve. Balancing their responsibilities as a DSP with their personal life has been challenging, and it is important for DSPs to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Please vote yes on HB 5026. DSPs, the people they support and their families are counting on your support!

Thanks!



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