

Submitter: Amanda Valerio
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Hello, my name is Amanda Valerio, and I am the Residential Manager for Vista Supported Living Apartments at Shangri-La, we have 14 Individuals that live at Vista and 7 DSPs that support them. I am asking you to include POP 132 in the budget which provides funding to increase wages for Direct Support Professionals to address the ongoing workforce crisis in the State's IDD system. Thank you for your current investment into the IDD system, the new rate model helped tremendously to retain our current employees; people who are comfortable and familiar to the Individuals we serve, and we need to protect and reinforce this investment for the future.

Unfortunately, the pandemic and changing workforce has continued to diminish our progress on wages. Even though providers consistently pay wages above the amount that is funded, we still struggle to hire and retain employees. The current hourly rate for DSP wages paid for by the budget per Individual in Supported Living Services is \$10.80 per hour. We pay our staff at least \$6 more per hour as new staff and it goes up from there. The staff vacancy rate is currently 23% in the State. And July 1st of this year the minimum wage is set to take another giant step up – and our wages must match this because these are not minimum wage jobs! This means we cannot keep these crucial workers - this puts families and people with disabilities at risk.

Currently at the program I manage, we support an Individual that has developed life skills by leaps and bounds. She came to us from Mom, and she did not have working knowledge of many parts of "adulting." She had never really been grocery shopping and the first time we took her it was very overwhelming for her, so she used to use online ordering, but with time and encouragement from staff she now goes into the store by herself, and staff are available in the car if they are needed. This is just a small example, as she has also grown in other ways exponentially to the point that she successfully planned, budgeted, and traveled on her own to see her boyfriend who lives in England. None of this would have been possible without the support and care of the staff that she knows and trusts.

Please, please value the work and raise the wage by including POP 132 in the budget. DSPs, the Individuals served, and their families are counting on your support!

With the greatest sincerity,

Amanda Valerio