

Submitter: Erica Andrews
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

My name is Erica Andrews. I am the Executive Director of WVRC in Lebanon. Our organization supports approximately 100 individuals with disabilities through our community outreach and vocational opportunities. Today, I come to ask that you include POP 132 in the budget which provides funding to increase DSP wages. As well as HB2457 to aid this movement. The office of Developmental Disability Services recognized the workforce crisis in our state's IDD system and developed the POP 132.

Thank you for your previous investment during the last session when you agreed to fund the current rate model. We saw DSP wages increase significantly after that. We would not be operating without it and we need to enhance this investment.

The rapidly changing workforce and aftermath from the pandemic has continued to erode our progress on wages. We struggle to hire and retain employees. We have not been able to bring back all the individuals we served prior to the pandemic due low staffing. This complicated, critical work is often paid less than individuals working in the fast-food industry. DSP's are taking care of humans, giving them medications, feeding them, helping with everyday living activities. This job should pay a livable wage.

Current reimbursement rates for these services are based on cost studies that are now several years old. On July 1st we will see another giant step up in minimum wage. As providers we cannot keep up with these crucial workers. I think of the people we serve and the eagerness they have to play an active role in their community. To be able to live a life with dignity and purpose. When we are short staffed, we must turn individuals away for services and left with residential providers who are also short staffed. Offering them little engagement or assistance with things they want to accomplish.

Could you imagine not being able to go to work or a meeting in the community because the supports you need are not available due to low DSP staffing. Not afforded the luxury of getting your medications on time, food, activities to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Because of a staffing crisis.

Staff vacancy rate is 23%, this puts families and individuals with disabilities at risk. 85% of providers have reduced their capacity because they cannot find workers.

Please value the work and raise the wage by including POP 132 in the budget. The

individuals we support, their families, and our DSP's, they are all counting on your support. Thank you.