

Submitter: Christopher Merritt
On Behalf Of: SB538
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

I am writing to stress the importance of SB538 and ensuring it is passed and funded. Parents of the most disabled children in our state are struggling. Hours for support workers have been allocated, but there is a massive shortage of providers, meaning many of these parents have to forgo working in order to care for their children. This puts a financial strain on the family, in addition to the physical, mental, and emotional strain they already suffer.

Getting into the program to qualify for caregiver support requires a number of evaluations, so no one is simply signing up to milk the system. The need is there and it is well documented. The money is already in the budget. Allowing parents to be paid caregivers will improve the quality of life for so many families. And the parents know their children better than anyone. They know how to provide the necessary care. They are already doing the job, let them be paid for it.

My wife went to college and majored in psychology. She had to take out a number of loans to do it and graduate. But now, because we have two children in the CIIS program, she is unable to work because they have such high needs. She uses her education daily in caring for them and we struggle to pay back her loans in addition to all the other costs that are part of daily living.

The brief period during the pandemic when she was able to be a paid caregiver was life-changing for us, as it must have been for many other families in the state. A weight was lifted off our backs as we no longer needed to consider every dollar before spending anything. We were able to pay off credit cards and spend more in the community, improving the local economy. We were able to afford a replacement appliance when ours died. It was very hard to go back to pinching pennies when the program ended. These hard working parents deserve to be paid for their labor.

Please stress the importance of SB538 and ensure the funding for it is available. It is so important to hundreds of not thousands of families like mine.