

Dear Chair Hartman and members of the committee,

I am writing to ask that you support HB 2150 with the -1 Amendment. I'm writing to you as not just a concerned citizen but as someone who has been a Direct Support Professional (DSPs) for almost 13 years. DSPs play a very crucial role in not just our community but all over. DSPs provide essential care and support to individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). Despite the demanding need of this work and its immense importance and value to our society, DSP wages continue to remain really low, leading to shortages and high turnover rates.

You might find yourself asking "what is a Direct Support Professional?" Some might reference us as superheroes but I assure you we are not superheroes. DSPs assist individuals with I/DD with their daily living. All the activities you do in your daily life the people I support do those same things. Sometimes they just need some extra help. Personal hygiene such as bathing, using the bathroom, getting dressed haircuts etc. Meal preparations some people I support have special diets so making meals with the right/correct ingredients where they are getting a well-balanced meals. Supporting some individuals who may experience behaviors either to themselves which is Self-Injurious Behavior (SIB) like biting themselves or hitting their head or other body parts. Some individuals may have behaviors with aggression towards others which can look like hitting, kicking, hair-pulling, biting, pinching and scratching. Medication administration and all other health needs play a big part in what we do. DSPs make sure all medications are up to date with the doctor's office and pharmacy. Administering their medications at the right time and doses. Schedule doctor appointments and following what is in their medical plans and protocols. One of my personal favorites is helping them build connection in the community and going out and doing what brings them joy and happiness which could be shopping, going to the movies, walking around the mall, going to our local family fun center and riding in go karts, going on hikes or to the lakes. While doing all of this we also foster independence, provide emotional support while trying to help some of our most vulnerable community members live their best lives. This work requires patience, compassion, empathy, specialized training, physical and emotional resilience.

Despite the high level of skill, dedication, and emotional investment required for this job, DSPs often earn wages barely above minimum wage. Over my nearly 13 years in this field, I have worked alongside many phenomenal DSPs—dedicated professionals who were deeply committed to the people they supported. Yet, too often, they were forced to leave due to financial instability, worsening an already severe workforce shortage.

When a DSP like Sally, who has worked for two years and built a strong bond with the individuals she supports, is forced to leave, the impact is profound. It disrupts the lives of those who rely on our services, causing distress and instability. It also places an immense burden on the remaining staff, who must stretch themselves even thinner. This leads to burnout, making it even harder to provide the consistent, high-quality care that people with disabilities deserve.

I have had coworkers who worked full-time as DSPs while holding down a second full-time job just to make ends meet. Others have been forced to live in motels with their families, struggling to survive despite working tirelessly in this field. The issue isn't just that DSPs can't afford to live—it's that low wages drive high turnover, which directly affects the quality of support we provide. As more staff leave, the pressure on those who remain grows, pushing even more people out of the field. It's an endless, devastating cycle.

If we want to ensure stability and quality in the care we provide, we must address this crisis. Higher wages are not just about fairness for DSPs—they are about protecting the well-being of the individuals who rely on our support. Without competitive wages, we will continue to lose skilled, compassionate professionals, and the people we serve will suffer the most.

I urge you to support legislative measures that increase wages for Direct Support Professionals. Investing now in fair compensation will not only improve the retention it will also attract people who will want to work in this field which in turn enhance the quality of life for those that depend on us and the services we provide.

I appreciate your time and consideration for HB 2150 with the -1 Amendment and prioritize funding for IDD services in the 2025-2027 budget. I hope you will take action to address this very urgent matter and ensure that DSPs (not superheroes) receive the fair wages they all deserve.