

**TO: Joint Subcommittee On Human Services**

**FROM: Gwen Whelton, Family Member**

**DATE: 4/3/25**

**SUBJECT: SB5526**

Co-Chair Senator Campos and Co-Chair Representative Valerama and members of the Committee. I am a parent to a gentleman - Christopher. Christopher is 29 and has developmental disabilities as well as physical disabilities. Christopher has Cerebral palsy, a seizure disorder, cortical blindness, microcephaly, and Angelman syndrome. Christopher doesn't walk or talk, and requires full assistance for bathing, dressing, and feeding. He has a g-tube.

The care Christopher requires may seem minor - bathing, dressing, changing, feeding, transferring, g-tube feeds.....but that is his daily needs, that does not account for the more soft skills a DSP needs while working with my son - one of the most important is interaction. Christopher doesn't speak and does not have formal language ( he loves to be included in anything happening), Another more critical skill is having a watchful eye that would indicate something is amiss. Whether it is that he is uncomfortable due to his hip problem, he is hungry, he is starting into a seizure phase, he is developing a migraine, he is hot or cold (his thalamus doesn't work so he cannot regulate his body temperature). Believe me when I say Christopher is

a job. He is a full-time job. All the while the DSP must continue to provide day-to-day activities that keep him interacting and being a part of his community.

I am asking for us to fund SB5526.

I did the work because I loved my son. DSP's do it because they have a calling. They are at the mercy of what you decide their services are worth.

We need to add value to the work a DSP does and the service they provide. DSP's are required to learn so many things about different people in their care - because no one is the same, and no disability is the same.

It took me 27 years to be an expert on Christopher. It requires multiple people to learn what I have struggled for years to learn and DSPs have to learn it in days or weeks. The training they receive and the knowledge they have is incredibly deep and the compassion needed is beyond words.

Because of the skill level needed to provide support to my son, I am scared and heartsick when a DSP leaves. They leave not because they don't like the work. They leave because they have family obligations that need to be met.

It frustrates me when I think that someone can make more money working in fast food than doing the work that is so vital. We need to value the skills they bring and develop.

They need to have a wage where they can provide for their families, have time off, and not have to work additional hours or jobs to supplement their income.

We need to understand that we are running out of trained valuable assets. What will we do when there is no one to care for people like my son? I know that I am at an age where my son will most likely outlive me and I am afraid of the lack of support shown to this sector therefore I worry about my son's future. This labor force is suffering from a shortage of these much-needed workers.

I want stability in the workforce not just for my son but for others just like him and for the people who love them and the workers who give so much.