

TO: Joint Subcommittee On Human Services
FROM: Gwen Whelton, Family Member
DATE: 4/3/25
SUBJECT: SB5526 Increase funding for IDD Services

Co-Chair Campos and Co-Chair Valderrama and members of the Committee.

I am a parent to Christopher, a 29 year old gentleman who has developmental as well as physical disabilities and I am asking you to increase funding for IDD Services in the DHS budget.

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 via his g-tube.

I know that already sounds like a lot, but that only addresses his daily needs. It does not account for the soft skills a DSP needs while working with my son - one of the most important is interaction. Christopher doesn't speak or have formal language and relies on his DSP to help him be included in everything. Another critical skill is having a watchful eye that would indicate something is amiss; 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 - the list goes on and on.

Believe me when I say supporting Christopher is a full-time job, and all the while his DSP must continue to provide day-to-day activities that keep him engaged and part of his community.

My son is only one example of the people DSPs support - they 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 is easy to justify higher wages for people with a college education. It is interesting that we do not put the same value on the more rare skills of empathy, compassion and creativity.

It took me 27 years to be an expert on Christopher. DSPs do not have that advantage - they only have days or weeks. 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, but because they cannot afford to stay.

Please, show me that you value my son more than you value people who serve you hamburgers. Both are important work, but DSPs literally have my son's life in their hands.

As I get older, I worry about what my son will do when there is no one to care for him. The shortage of workers will only grow without your action. Please give me peace

of mind by increasing IDD funding and DSP wages in the DHS Budget.