

Submitter: Allison Stark

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5526

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Albertina Kerr employs over 300 Direct Support Professionals, or DSPs, that work in residential group homes supporting youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I am asking you to support wage increases for DSPs in the state budget. The people we support rely on the dedication and hard work of DSPs to receive crucial round-the-clock support in our residential group homes. Kerr continues to have challenges recruiting and retaining these essential staff as we are limited by our fixed reimbursement rates from the State, as well as competition from fast food, warehouse and retail employers that offer higher wages.

Generally speaking, when we're talking about the frontline workers that support people with I/DD there are Personal Support Workers, or PSWs, and DSPs. PSWs, are hired and managed by the individual or the family and work in their home. These workers are represented by SEIU at the state level.

Then there are DSPs that are hired by agencies like Kerr that work in residential group homes. Some of these workers are also represented by SEIU. DSPs can also work in in homes when individual's or their families choose not to manage their own workers.

2 years ago, the legislature directed ODHS to do a wage and rate study on these different positions. The preliminary report was released last October and the final copy was released in January 2025.

The recommendation from this study was to bring PSWs wages up to \$25 and DSP wages to \$23.20. To put this in perspective we are currently reimbursed on average \$18.77/hour.

The Governor's introduced budget included the funds to allow for PSWs to be bargained by SEIU up to \$25/hour. This is great news and I am wholeheartedly supportive of investing in these positions. However, there was not a similar consideration for DSPs.

Maintaining DSPs at \$18.77 when PSWs are going up to \$25/hour is unconscionable. It also continues the tradition of pitting workers against one another. This shouldn't be

either or. All workers deserve a living wage. I ask for the legislature's support for raising DSP wages in the state budget.