

Submitter: Tawnia Cotton
On Behalf Of: Living Opportunities INC
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

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To: Joint Ways and Means Committee

Subject: The Critical Need for Increased Wages for Direct Support Professionals
Dear Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to you as a dedicated Direct Support Professional (DSP) who is committed to empowering individuals with disabilities to lead meaningful, independent lives within their communities. The work I do is not just a profession—it is a calling. Yet, despite my dedication and passion, the current compensation for DSPs is insufficient to sustain a basic standard of living.

To illustrate, I commute 50 miles round trip each day from a neighboring city. The escalating cost of gasoline has placed a considerable financial strain on me, to the extent that I must donate plasma twice a week just to afford the fuel required for my commute. Additionally, the rising cost of housing necessitates that I work multiple jobs, including driving for Uber, to cover essential living expenses.

This reality is not unique to me but shared by many DSPs who struggle to make ends meet. The inadequate wages force many of us to work extended hours, take on secondary employment, or rely on public assistance. This unsustainable situation contributes to a high turnover rate, disrupting the consistency and quality of care that individuals with disabilities deserve.

Retaining experienced and compassionate DSPs is vital for maintaining the integrity of the services we provide. Without competitive wages, we risk losing qualified professionals, further straining a field already facing workforce shortages. Therefore, I respectfully urge the Committee to prioritize increased funding for DSP wages in the upcoming budget cycle. Investing in the livelihood of DSPs directly supports the well-being and dignity of the individuals we serve.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and share more about the challenges DSPs face daily. Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to supporting the essential work carried out by Direct Support Professionals.

Sincerely,

Tawnia Cotton

Job Coach

Certified Employment Specialist Professional

