

To: Joint Ways and Means Committee

From: Dakota Foote

Re: Ways and Means Roadshow – Investing in DSP Wages

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, and members of the committee

I'm a recruiter for Advocates for Life Skills and Opportunities and manage all hiring in Central and Southern Oregon. I'm writing to you today to advocate for an increase funding in wages for direct support professionals who work with people with disabilities.

Before I became a recruiter in 2022, I was a DSP for 5 years, and I understand the demands that go with the job. Quality DSP support requires an ability to empathize with others and build a long-term foundation of trust between you and the person supported. This trust not only helps make the people we support comfortable with going on community outings and to events, but opening up about personal problems they may be keeping to themselves or not fully understand. Problems like self-harm, financial abuse, depression, and medical concerns.

DSPs often have a job description similar to a Certified Nursing Assistant, assisting with Hoyer lifts, medication management, colostomy bags, cleaning up blood and bodily fluids, showering and changing. These are demanding tasks that are performed on a daily basis and yet they are often paid below \$19 an hour.

DSPs are also required to obtain certifications for CPR, first-aid, and OIS, which total roughly 24 hours of training. These trainings also need to be recertified every 2 years in addition to the 12 to 24 hours of in-service training that needs to be completed every year depending on what kind of support the DSP provides. DSPs are also required to submit a background check every 2 years and are held to a high standard of qualifications.

When I inform new applicants of a DSPs wage range, I often hear "I'm sorry, I can't survive on that wage" or "That's ok, I don't do this for the money". Too many qualified people leave because they're unable to make a living off this work and too many people settle when they deserve better.

A DSP is considered an entry level position and is therefore at the lowest wage band, but there are so many essential interpersonal skills and extended training required by the state to be a successful DSP, many advocates don't feel it's worth the pay. Raising DSP wages will allow us to hire more quality, long term supports for people with disabilities and provide DSP with the wages they deserve for their work and dedication.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I truly hope changes can be made so we can better support the people giving everything to support others.

Thank you,
Dakota Foote

Advocate Relations Specialist at ALSO - Advocates for Life Skills and Opportunity

