

DT: March 17, 2021
TO: Honorable Chair and Distinguished Members of the Committee
FR: Lori Burchfield
RE: Testimony in Support of SB 154

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 154.

Profile:

Parent of a 24 year old son with comorbid disabilities since birth and as a result requires 24x7 support. Second to being a mom, I worked as a Senior Leader for a Fortune 500 company for 35 years with the focus on human capital management. Upon my son's exit from the school system, it became quickly apparent that I was going to need to give up my career so I could focus on caring for my son. It is a dramatic and scary transition from the school system to adult services for those with I/DD. While an easy decision to leave my successful career because my son always comes first, the restless and sleepless nights increased because of the worry of who is going to help care for my son and how will the financial juggle work for now and years to come. Since my son aged out of the school system 3 ½ years ago, the stress of this worry has magnified. Having a child with complex needs is difficult enough in itself, an alarming concern remains with the lack of sufficient, reliable, and consistent support for my son. While multiple factors may influence this significant issue with care for those with I/DD, there is one glaring primary reason that contributes to this dynamic and it is lack of appropriate pay.

Imagine this real life example that repeats itself far too often:

- The qualifications of the candidate to be able to fulfill the complex position are not what we need but we are desperate after searching for months to even attract applicants so we hire the candidate.
- Training has to start very basic as this candidate does not have any experience with individuals with disabilities but it is all we can get to apply.
- Staff and parent time is extensively spent on training the new hire with the individual(s) they will be serving.
- Parents are very nervous. The DSPs aren't really qualified which can become a life and death situation for our loved one.
- After several months with our loved one becoming attached to the individual, the individual starts indicating dissatisfaction with the pay compared to the responsibilities of the role.
- Month three of employment, after a significant investment of resources and handholding, the employee terminates and goes to McDonalds or Walmart to work.
- The cycle begins again. Over and over.

As parents:

- This is traumatic for our son with the revolving door of staff. Staff that has the potential to be superstars but realize they can't live on the hourly rate of pay after the first few months.
- Our son then has increased anxiety, seizures, doctors get involved and adjust medications, and more support is often needed through this constant change of staff.
- As parents, we cry, we worry, we pray.surely this insufficient pay rate will be addressed.....year after year we remain hopeful.
- As parents, we are scared for our son's future because the constant issue with lack of pay for staff DIRECTLY impacts our son's wellbeing.
- When staffing turns, as parents, we often find ourself in the role of supporting our son because we don't have any help. What will happen as we continue to age with no family in the city? Who fills the gap when staffing turns because of pay? Now, my son is lucky enough to have us and we pick up the gap. That won't always be.

I'm not sure if any of you have experienced this heartbreaking rollercoaster directly. If you have, my heart goes out to you because you know, like I do, how frightening this issue of pay for support has become and how the lack of sufficient pay negatively impacts the care of individuals with I/DD. If you haven't, try to immerse yourself in living it for a moment with someone that has. When you see it and feel it, it changes your belief on what needs to happen. I welcome the opportunity to provide you this experience. You will walk away thinking differently. I promise.

Thank you for your consideration!