

David Cowing  
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LD 210

Committee members,

My son (Jay) lives in his home of 25 years in Bath. He went to school in Bath, from Head Start through his graduation from Morse High School. He is well known in Bath, and takes great pleasure in telling anyone who will listen that “Bath is my home town!”

Jay is very lucky to be able to live in a licensed Section 21 group home that is a model of what HCBS (Home and Community Based Services) should look like. Yes, his intellectual disability, mental health and behavioral challenges, along with his physical needs, often create problems for him. But he is fortunate to have skilled staff around him most of the time who know him well and can handle the difficulties that he runs into every day.

Unfortunately, the sustained Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) staffing shortage, a longstanding crisis, is coming to a head. The agency that supports Jay has been forced to close several group homes—a trend throughout the state—due to its inability to recruit and retain staff to do the challenging work involved in providing the daily support Jay requires.

Almost all of the DSPs in Jay’s home regularly work overtime in addition to having second jobs to make ends meet. Burnout is a constant concern, and my wife and I have seen many good DSPs come and go who are forced to look for jobs elsewhere that are much easier and provide better pay.

As the HHS and AFA committees review both the supplemental and next biennial budgets, I would ask that legislators remember the commitment that was made in the past to pay the staff at Jay’s house at least marginally better via COLAs. My wife and I worry every day about the uncertain future of Jay’s home. We constantly wonder whether the staff he relies on can afford to keep doing the hard work to support him, or will be forced to leave, in spite of their dedication, for higher pay elsewhere.

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