

Darla Chafin
Augusta
LD 210

TESTIMONY AGAINST THE ELIMINATION OF THE COLA INCREASE
for DIRECT CARE WORKERS

Darla S. Chafin Augusta, Maine
Community Connect Maine

LD 21

The COLA increase is only one of many attempts to provide the Direct Support Professionals a salary worthy of their efforts. The difference over the years has not been the type of work, but the recognition that rather than being child care and toilet training, it should be respectful care and growing understanding of the needs of people whose disabilities are now hopefully being recognized and respected as not their fault, but something they did not want or make happen but a disability that must be addressed and minimized for a more fulfilling and happier life.

We quietly learn to live with being left or right-handed or far-sighted or near-sighted. Luckily, we have accommodations that help but don't cure. One of the differences is that it is only recently, that we have begun to help them find compensation for their serious problems. It's not the same as it was supposed to be, but with the right care, maybe even a bit of respect for their struggle, they bloom. Unexpectedly, you may bloom as well. I've seen that happen with these people who are stellar DSPs AND with their clients. My daughter's life became more "normal" when she was respected for good choices, gently shown acceptable choices for those negative ones, and carefully selected staff she trusted, And she chose well, My son once found a staff person in a car that really needed some help to be safe. While we danced in the house, he quietly made the car a bit safer so she could drive until that paycheck came in.

I unexpectedly arrived at the same house to find no one in it. I panicked a bit but the door was open and I could see everyone was in the back yard and this 5 ft tall woman was digging a BIG hole. They were fascinated and other staff were watching. It seems a client had a particular passion for a certain color in clothes and had a new blouse. But she also had a habit of flushing things down the toilet. Her distress was evident. Sometimes, like the rest of us, they do things and regret it. The blouse wasn't in the cesspool, but the DSP had proven that she would do what she could for her girls. And she was appreciated. Maybe more to the point, I have had staff follow my daughter from one placement to another, explaining she only wanted to work to keep in contact. She not only kept in contact, the house was noticeably in better shape after she had been there.

Another semi-oldtimer called to tell me about another fall Cathy had, She now wears a helmet when mobile... that she does not like, but has had to have her head and around her eyes stitched up multiple times. The call I got was not unusual. I wanted to get there so we could be together. As I asked if they could wait or needed an ambulance, Cathy turned her head in a way that made this woman afraid the eyeball was falling out. We decided on the ambulance. She cradled my child and I'm sure got bloody. She called for oversight for the others, got the ambulance, and was at the hospital when I arrived there.

These are not things someone earning less than minimum wage should have to do. The fact they deal with such circumstances calmly and efficiently is more than I can say for many. Good DSP training makes a difference. Cathy doesn't ask me to stay overnight after such accidents these days, but she does check that her staff is nearby. I'm closing in on 90. I have macular degeneration so don't drive; I'm trying to outlive her, but I may not make it. I think she knows that. And I'm terrified of the thought. Please take this step to offer another crumb of stability to a very shaky system.

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