

Testimony of Celia Boutet

LD1932: An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services January 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **LD 1932: An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development**.

My name is **Celia Boutet**. I am a Direct Support Professional and Float at **3Rivers**, where I have worked for eleven years. Our mission is to empower and support people with disabilities to live purposeful, connected lives by promoting independence, dignity, and inclusion.

I have worked as a Direct Support Professional in residential settings for **eighteen years**, and this work has been more than a job to me—it has been a calling. I entered this field because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities, and I have stayed because of the fulfillment that comes from supporting individuals to achieve their goals, build independence, and live full, meaningful lives. The everyday moments—celebrating small victories, building trust, and being a consistent, reliable presence—are what make this work so impactful.

However, **low wages in group homes and disability services contribute directly to chronic staff shortages, high turnover, and inconsistent quality of care**, all of which harm the well-being of consumers. After seven years with an organization and job I truly loved, I was forced to leave due to a pay freeze that had been in place since the day I was hired. Despite my experience and dedication, my wage never increased. When my husband passed away, I could no longer afford to stay in a position that did not provide a living wage. I had to move on to survive, even though it meant leaving the people I had grown to love and care for. This is the reality many Direct Support Professionals face when wages remain stagnant.

When DSPs are underpaid, agencies struggle to recruit and retain qualified, experienced staff. This leads to frequent disruptions in routines, reduced community engagement, and increased stress for individuals who rely on stable, trusting relationships for daily support. DSPs do not learn this work in a few months—it takes years to understand each person's communication style, preferences, and unique needs. We cannot afford to keep losing dedicated, experienced DSPs because wages do not reflect the skill, responsibility, and commitment this work requires.

Implementing a standard wage increase would help professionalize the DSP workforce by improving retention, boosting morale, and attracting skilled caregivers who can provide consistent, person-centered care. For consumers, this means greater stability, improved safety, stronger relationships with staff, and increased opportunities for independence, inclusion, and quality of life.

I am deeply concerned about what will happen to the people and families I support if a stable DSP workforce is not available. Without consistent, trained staff, individuals with disabilities may lose access to the daily support they rely on to live safely and work toward their goals. Families are often forced to step in beyond their capacity, leading to burnout, financial strain, and emotional stress. In some cases, the lack of reliable community-based support can even lead to institutionalization for individuals who thrive in their homes and communities.

These individuals and families deserve continuity, dignity, and dependable support. I respectfully urge you to **support LD 1932** to ensure livable wages and cost-of-living increases for Direct Support Professionals and to protect the well-being of the people we serve.

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