

Jennifer Brooking
Cape Elizabeth

To the Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,
I am the parent of two children who qualify for Section 28 in-home support services due to their diagnoses of Autism. We have been in the system for about 15 years. In that time, my children have gone through a total of at least 29 BHP's, there may be more but I've lost count.

I have seen the dependability and quality of BHP's decline considerably in the last 8 years, even Pre-Covid. The waiting lists for this necessary service has gotten longer and longer due to the shortage of BHP's.

My daughter, due to her significant challenges, qualifies for about 20 hours a week of in-home support. Three years ago, when I sent testimony for a similar bill, she was averaging 0-3 hours of care. She never received more than 11 hours a week since that letter and has now been without services for several months due to the provider not having enough staff. My son qualifies for 15 hours, was receiving 0 hours for two years and since that letter we felt the need to discharge from services due to the inconsistency and turn over that resulted in further harm to his mental health.

My children, like many other children (and adults) with developmental disabilities, need this important medical treatment. Research has proven that these services better their chance at a better quality of life. They learn life skills, safety skills, independence and self-advocacy. These services can reduce negative behaviors, help individuals to be able to learn how to go out into the community and be able to attend events and after school activities they wouldn't otherwise be able to access.

Receiving these services consistently as children would have significantly lowered their cost of care as adults. Research has proven that it lowers their chance for need of residential care, hospitalization, mental health services, institutions, correction facilities and being placed in a group home.

When my children were receiving appropriate services with a dependable, qualified BHP, our family thrived. They haven't received this in YEARS.

My children are now soon to be 18 and 15. I have heard for years that adult services are slim to none and that dependable and qualified DSP's are hard to come by. There are amazing people who want to do this job, LOVE to work with this population, but can't afford to do so as the pay is not a livable wage. Raising the salaries for BHP's and DSP's is crucial in helping my soon to be adult children and the thousands of others in our state that have been waiting for appropriate support and services.

Please consider supporting a pass of LD 283, LD 878, LD 1157, LD 1267 and LD 1469 to help ensure an increase in rates that will go to increasing wages. I encourage that you also support LD 1204, which we may be able to utilize in the future as I am unable to work because of the lack of access to the medically necessary services my children are entitled to. Thank you for all you do and for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Brooking, Cape Elizabeth