

I am writing to give my support towards LD 878. As a DSP myself – working in this field for the past 7 years – my thoughts and perspectives come from an intimate, firsthand perspective and I appreciate the opportunity to share with you all today.

As I'm sure you are all aware the State of Maine, like much of the country is in the midst of a DSP staffing crisis which has only been exacerbated during the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability to hire, train and retain a skilled workforce has become increasingly difficult as DSP wages remain largely stagnant. It is not only morally imperative but is federally mandated through HCBS policy to provide quality services to the population receiving waiver services. This task is not possible without the ability to offer a wage that is commensurate with the often challenging work being performed.

In 2017 PCPID (President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities) released a report to the President outlining findings and recommendations to address the country's Direct Support Workforce Crisis. The report identified low wages, scant benefits, limited training and lack of career advancement opportunities as major contributing factors to our current crisis and made recommendations for immediate action to begin addressing the issue including increased wages/reimbursement rates for DSPs.

The commitment to improving our current situation through increased wages for DSPs, as this bill proposes, should be seen not only as an investment towards improving the lives of those supported, by receiving support from skilled and fairly compensated staff, but as an investment in the economic future of Maine and the country at large. Nearly half of the DSPs in the country report relying on some form of public assistance while many others are unable to afford adequate health insurance both of which create financial burden on State and Federal resources. Hiring and training new employees is far more costly than retaining existing staff which is all but impossible given our current situation. Taking steps to make direct support a viable career

Many have been calling for "immediate" action towards addressing this current crisis for over a decade yet the situation remains in place. The solutions needed to begin to address this issue are myriad but they are also concrete and attainable. A move towards ensuring a better wage for DSPs is certainly a step in the right direction and an opportunity for the State of Maine to begin to get ahead of a crisis that, if ignored, will only continue to grow in severity, prodding change not from thoughtful and calculated concern but from desperation.

Thank you. Sincerely,
Tyler Heydolph

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Creative Trails/Support Solutions

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