

May 4, 2021

Testimony in Favor of:

LD 1573, "An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues"

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Tucker Conley and I live in Portland, Maine. I am a self-advocate and involved with Speaking Up For Us.

Changes to the rate system and DSP wages are definitely needed right now. There is a lot of turnover with DSP staff. I have had at least two of my support staff leave their DSP positions in the last year. I think this might be because they hire college students who then move on to other things. These types of jobs at entry level wages tend to attract people just entering the work force.

People with disabilities rely on consistency. It is very inconsistent when you have to always meet new staff. New staff do not know you as well as someone you have known for a long time. I find myself always having to get to know new people.

I have gotten attached to some of my staff, and when they leave often, I feel sad. I then have to do the entire getting to know you process all over again. When one staff leaves, it is on to another new person. I have really fell into depression because of all the change.

This staff turnover disrupts my life and I have to get adjusted to a new person and their style. Every person might have a different personality.

Not only have I had two DSP's leave their jobs this year, there has also been quite a bit of turnover hire up in my support agency who have left. When a staff leaves I still get some support within the program, but it can still take awhile for a new person to come in because of the hiring process. Right now, my agency is having a hard time finding and keeping staff. I'm not sure if people are applying for these jobs as much right now. I think that the low rate of pay may be a reason people don't apply and maybe the jobs are part time and not full time. There may not be good benefits like health insurance.

Currently there is a hazard pay difference in Portland. I think this is currently in courts somewhere, but I have heard that my agency would not be able to hire DSP's because of the cost. I have also heard that some agencies are going to have to leave the city of Portland because they cannot afford to pay hazard pay. This issue will make it even more difficult to hire and retain DSP's.

In Conclusion, I fully support LD1523. People with disabilities don't deserve to see the further erosion and eradication of the relationship of their direct support staff due to insufficient wages and inadequate health insurance in the State of Maine. Doing so leaves them vulnerable to severe effects to both their physical and mental health. It is past time that Maine "values" the

Relationships between people with disabilities and their DSPs/Staff, effectively immediately.

Thank you for the chance to submit my testimony about Direct Support workforce issues.

Sincerely,

Tucker Conley

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