

Alexander MacKenzie
Bangor

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Myer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1573, An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.

My name is Alexander MacKenzie. I live in Bangor, and have worked for many years as a Direct Support Professional for OHI. This field can be rewarding, and it is satisfying to know that I have made a positive difference in the lives of people with disabilities. One of the biggest challenges I have seen is the recruitment and retention of qualified Direct Support Professionals, and this relates directly to the rate of pay, in my opinion. Being a DSP can be very difficult, especially from an emotional standpoint, and it sometimes can even be physically dangerous. The work we do is often misunderstood and under-appreciated, even by the very people we support. I have seen many excellent staff leave for financial reasons over the years, and while I'm sure that's true for many fields, it seems particularly problematic for this one.

The starting rate of pay for Direct Support Professionals is low considering that it is part of the health care profession. Where I work, we used to receive annual merit increases, but merit increases are now uncommon. We don't even get cost of living increases. For me personally, inherent staffing shortages are a double-edged sword. The person I support has many challenges and a history of violence. He has a complicated Behavior Plan, and staff adherence and consistency has been crucial to maintaining safety. Staffing shortages can cause inexperienced staff to be forced into working, putting themselves, other staff, members of the community, and the person we support at risk. At the same time, staffing shortages create an opportunity for many DSP's, such as myself, to work overtime to adequately support our families. This, of course, creates the problem of keeping us away from our families more than we would like, and contributes to burnout. I hope that there can be a solution to this problem, and I believe that the passage of LD 1573 is an important step in the right direction.

Sincerely,
Alexander MacKenzie