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My name is Justin Reinhardt and I am a dsp. there are many challenges to the job that we as dsps have to navigate through, especially in terms of material conditions. My wife and I are live in caregivers for people with intellectual disabilities, but we do not have a space of our own here, the reason for that is because the wages do not afford us the ability to own or even rent a home in the town in which we live. this is quite a burden to bear. In our off time we go to visit family, but none of that family is in Maine. We drive to Michigan, or fly to California or wherever we can in order to stay with friends or family as the housing costs are too high for those of us that make minimum wage to be able to afford laying down roots in any singular place.

My wife and I just had a baby, a little girl that we would love to bring up as a Mainer, however with the wages provided it is just not a feasible reality. we are at the mercy of our employer for housing and wages, should we lose one or the other we would be forced into a different state to raise our daughter with the financial assistance of family and probably a few roommates. For an occupation as needed as this one is, the material conditions afforded to the workers make them little more than indentured servants. We are able to stay and live here for now, until we are no longer profitable to the company we work for or, they decide to do away with live in caregivers and switch their practices to rotating staff.

We are some of the only consistent people in our clients lives and that is at the mercy of the company we work for. we have done this job for 8 years, and before covid worked an average of about 143 hours every 2 weeks, now we work anywhere from 224 hours to 270+ hours every two weeks. While we could survive on the wages of our covid pay because of the overtime involved we recognize this is temporary, and working 16 hour days for more than a year now has made us realize these hours not sustainable, or permanent. We see plenty of turnover as dsps, even with those that are not live ins like we are. wages have a lot to do with this, as some people really are just 1 breakdown away from not having the funds to fix their car to get to work, let alone afford rent.

This precarious situation is not healthy for any worker, and certainly, we deserve better. the fact is we are all going to need care eventually. I know I would feel much better if I knew the people taking care of me in my elder years made enough that they didn't have to rely on roommates for housing, were 1 breakdown away from being replaced, and had adequate material conditions to sustain a healthy living situation.

It is really hard to say that Maine cares about dsps as workers given that we are so expendable, paid so poorly, and are consistently fighting for funding for our programs. The fact is its hard to imagine Maine cares about dsps, if they do not afford them the ability to have their own living spaces.

In conclusion I will say that I love my job. I love my clients. However I would have to be economically illiterate to think that the state of Maine cares at all about those of us at the bottom doing the actual work. we can generate the profits by actually providing the services, but when we need housing, or transportation, or healthcare, or food, the fact is Maine doesn't pay us lowly workers enough to afford the conditions necessary to do the job. For example, if our company decided to get rid of the live in caregiving that we do and switch to a rotating staff that they wanted us to be a part of, there is no economical way that we would be able to survive here while working a regular 40 hour workweek. We would have to leave because we couldn't afford the cost of housing, let alone emergencies. It is an embarrassment to working people everywhere that we have allowed ourselves to become indentured servants to a system that would have us homeless as long as we showed up for work.

Raising wages to a barely livable standard is a start to treat the workers better and show some respect to those of us that actually generate the revenue for these companies, However it is just a start. There is plenty more that can be done to show the workers in the state of Maine that it actually cares about them. Allowing them to make enough to afford a living space is a start.