

Testimony of Mary Santamaria, HR Administrative Assistant, John F. Murphy Homes, Inc.

Before the Committee on Health and Human Services

Testifying in Support of L.D. 1573, *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues*

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, members of the joint standing committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Mary Santamaria, Human Resources Administrative Assistant of John F. Murphy Homes in Auburn. I am testifying in Support of L.D. 1573, An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.

I have been with John F. Murphy Homes for coming up on nine years. For the last three years, I have held my current Human Resources position as Administrative Assistant. Part of my responsibility in this position is putting efforts into recruiting for the Direct Support Professional position, which is currently entry-level and compensated at \$12.15 an hour. When my primary position was working in the homes as a DSP, I found myself frustrated with the help that we were hiring and often wondered what was going on in the chair that I actively sit now... Little did I know of the challenges they faced when seeking good and honest help from those who hold *forever intentions*.

Unfortunately, the applicants we are receiving are only seeking us for the *here and now* due to the rate of pay. We are a 'filler' for job seekers who are waiting for a better paying job to come along. This is not conducive with the long-term care that we provide for our individuals. The revolving door effect and inconsistent care is directly a result of the compensation that we are currently offering. Countless job seekers do not return my phone call after doing prescreens. Of course, rate of pay is discussed at the time of prescreening an applicant, prior to doing interviews. Many folks choose not to move on to the interviewing stage after hearing the rate of pay. Sometimes, they let me know they are not interested by simply ignoring my calls, texts and e-mails and other times they verbally tell me over the phone. I had an individual compare our rate of pay against a fast food restaurant and, verbatim, he said, "*No way, miss. I'm all set.*"

Because we are an entry-level position, requiring only a GED or a High School Diploma and must be 18 years of age or older, we have reached out to the JMG programs within the high schools and local colleges. While meeting with a JMG advisor for the Central Maine Community College location, she informed me that many of her previous students have actually worked for our agency (and others alike) and followed up with her after leaving employment with us, sharing that they were over-worked and under-paid. I appreciated her honest feedback but could not ignore the feeling of yet another door closing in my face on our search for help.

While attending job fairs, I am consistently representing the agency with the lowest wage for this kind of work. I feel that I am actively degrading the people we support when I say our rate of pay aloud. We are not receiving applications right now because the work that our DSP's do is rewarded at minimum wage. The folks that do come to us, many times, have a job history of bouncing from one place to another and tend not to stick with us for very long, either.

Over the years, our agency has had to make adjustments and one of those adjustments were to the healthcare that we offer our employees. As stands, I would personally say the insurance we offer is decent- although, when I first was employed with the agency, it was highly desired. Benefits are among one of the elements that job seekers who are intending to find a 'forever home' employer, want to know about. Recently, a study showed that the primary population in our direct care work force are New Mainers and Women with Children. As a mother, I personally gravitated to breaking down the cost for a DSP woman with a child looking for insurance. At minimum wage for \$12.15 an hour, a full-time 40 hour employee make \$486/week. In an eight-hour day, that is **\$97.20**. Here's a quick glance at the cost for the woman with children individuals who are working in our agency:

Medical Insurance: **\$79.43** (Employee + child)

Vision Insurance: **\$1.78** (Employee + child)

Dental Insurance: **\$16.16** (Employee + Family/child)

Total: \$97.37/week (pre-tax deduction) Taxable amount of \$388.63

After the taxable amount is handled from state and federal taxes, the good folks in our workforce take home even less. We want our employees who selflessly take care of others, to be able to take care of themselves. Trying to stay competitive while matching the inflation over the last several years has proven to be difficult.

How do I convince people to come do this work (no matter how rewarding I feel that it is) when they could be making more money doing less taxing work... the million dollar question that no one has an answer for. Looking back to how uneducated I was in this realm while working as a DSP, I realize this goes beyond HR and although it is difficult not to, I have a better understanding and no longer harbor the responsibility for lack of inquiries from job seekers at this time. It is above me and I am asking that you help us fix this problem for the people that we support and our respective employees. Our people supported deserve more than the *here and now* applicants we are currently receiving. Help us find the staff who have *forever intentions*.

Mary Santamaria,

HR Administrative Assistant/Direct Support Professional, CRMA

John F. Murphy Homes, Inc.

Mary Santamaria
Auburn

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