

Karen Thomas
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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....

Illustrate why supporting DSPs with 125% of minimum wage is needed by answering one or more of the following questions:

o What are the challenges for you to stay in this career field? The pay is exceptionally low, staff turnover, frustration of not being able to access services for our clients in a timely manner.

o How do low wages affect you? How do low wages affect your family? I personally am a single mom of an adult son who is disabled. I live paycheck to paycheck with little quality of life due to always being broke. We call ourselves the working poor. Have you ever had to struggle paycheck to paycheck? To put food on the table, sometimes I must utilize resources such as the food bank. I make too much to qualify for food stamps but not enough to pay for the ever-rising cost of foods. Most of the time, it is cheaper to eat unhealthy because I can't always afford fresh vegetables. My son is on certain medications that make him hungry all the time. It is impossible to make what I make and feed him and myself. No one should EVER have to go hungry in the world we live in right now.

o If you work overtime, how does overtime impact your quality of life? When overtime is available, I normally pick up as much as I can, however the rest of my life suffers. I am not able to be home with my son as much and when this happens, he declines and ends up in the hospital. That is not fair.

o Do you ever worry about client health and safety when you're short staffed? When we are short staffed at work and only 1 dsp is working on the floor the clients don't get the care they need and deserve. I always just pray that I make it through a shift when I'm alone with no medical issues because I'm not sure what we'd do.

o Do you see a lot of DSP turnover? During the pandemic? I've been here over a year. In over a year I've seen more people quit than I have been hired.

o How does that make you feel? How does it affect clients?

o What would you like to see / what do you need to happen to keep being a DSP? DSPs are undervalued. We take care of your loved ones 24/7. When they need advice, when they are sick, when they aren't having a good day, they consider DSP's someone they can turn to. We have to study, get different certificates, we pass medications, we learn about all of our clients' rights that the state of Maine makes into law, but sometimes cannot abide too because we just don't have enough staff.

o Does it feel like Maine values DSPs? Absolutely not!!!! We are the backbones of group homes. We deal with behaviors, but we still show love and compassion. We are a liaison between families, we clean urine and feces, in some instances we feed your loved ones through g-tubes, we do showers, we clean their rooms, we make their lives happier and more fulfilling, we are NOT lazy, we CARE, we put our own families on the back burner to make sure our client's needs are met above our own. Sometimes getting a few hours' sleep between shifts. We are tired and we DESERVE a raise. Our wages have been exceptionally low for a very long time. It is time for change before more people fall through the cracks of an already very broken system.

o Anything else that relates to low rates and low wages in your own life: paying bills, affording groceries, gas money, rent, etc. I think I covered all my concerns above!! I hope you consider everything I have said and give us the raise that we all very much deserve. My agency I work for starts people out at \$12.25 per hour. The minimum wage is \$12.15. Extra expenses such as new tires for my car or even a newer car are out of the realm of possibilities because the funds are just not there for it.

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