



Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 1280 - Westbrook, ME **04098**

Street Address:

15 Saunders Way, Suite 500-G, Westbrook, ME 04092

Telephone 207-523-5170 (V/TTY) – Fax 207-854-1787

Written Testimony in Support of LD 1574

An Act To Ensure Support for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism with High Behavioral Need

Health and Human Services Committee

May 3, 2021

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 Darnell Tudela, I am the Director of Residential Services for GMS. I have been with GMS for almost 7 years. Each year I have watched my department struggle with the ability to meet the needs of the consumers due to the lack of DSP's. This field has been unable to hire qualified staff due to the hourly wage. Seven years ago, I had 16 programs, the typical work week had 200 open staffing hours. For the past year and a half our open weekly staffing hour are over 1000 hours a week.

Each week we set up interviews with potential candidates only to find that candidates are not even willing to go through the interview process when their first question is answered for the pay rate. I have 13 group homes that serve a medically fragile aging population that operate daily understaffed. I am constantly viewing staffing patterns for safety and ensuring the quality of life is respected and supported and yet always considering whether to close another group home due to lack of staffing. We have 5 open beds and yet not able to respond to vendor calls because there simply are no staff to support new consumers. Just last week 4 of my homes lost DSPs due to higher wages in another field, too much strain working two jobs and the one reason I hear too often is "I need a change". This field of supporting adults with developmental disabilities pulls on employees emotionally, physically, mentally, and socially as employees find themselves working a tremendous number of hours with substandard pay for the level of support that is required and the number of hours, they must work to take care of their families and pay bills.

Our DSP training requires employees to complete the Direct support Professional Modules, Behavior Management, CRMA, CPR First/Aid, Alzheimer's, Anxiety Related disorders, Diabetes and many more; there is a tremendous amount of training that is required for DSP's some of which they can receive college credit for, yet the value of this workforce is paid less than that of a fast-food worker; the pay does not equal the skill set that is required.

The DSP supports in every season of a persons' life; they become emotionally bonded to those they support, and you can only imagine the difficulty it is for them when they can no longer work in this field due to the inability to continue at a wage that does not pay their bills, all the overtime offered is not going to fix this issue. It is time that a true wage increase happens to support this field.

Last week I had 6 employees make the decision to leave their position, that is another 240 open hours pushing our open hours up to close to 1400 hours a week. Employees working two jobs to try to make ends meet is only doable for a short period of time. By the end of last week, I was face again with the decision to close another program or maybe two. These programs are staffed 24 hours a day. One program is now affected with no overnight staff which requires the manager to do the overnights while I am picking up their Administrative Duties and covering call outs sometimes jumping in myself as a DSP.

This past year the HCBS has been reviewing our programs and increasing the expectations of the DSP, new policies to be written and trained with employees and then with the evidence of practice and delivery of services to be submitted. If we were able to offer a higher wage closer to \$20 an hour, we would attract a more skilled employee. We would be above the Walmart, McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken employee wages. We need you to support us and be an answer to this work force shortage with supporting of LD 1573.

Sincerely,

Darnell Tudella

Darnell Tudela
Director of Residential Services
Group Main Stream, Westbrook
Lisbon Falls