

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Sanchez, Vice Chair Olson, my name is Darla Pena. I'm a Direct Support Professional and I'm here to talk to about the importance of House Bill 2684

I know that just throwing money at organizations will not fix the problem. We need more transparency, and these organizations need to be held accountable. Our non-profit agencies are operating like they're for-profit corporations who have completely forgotten their mission statements. Individuals' needs are not being met, despite being the most expensive care setting in the state. At my agency, our individuals are no longer able to go on much needed trips unless they pay for their own staff. The individual I support has been wanting to go to DC for months, and has the money to pay for himself, but won't allow him to go without volunteer staff, which for low wage workers is virtually impossible. We're struggling just to make ends meet as it is.

Just this last pay period, I had to work 101 hours in order to make it from one paycheck to the next. That's over 50 hours a week of direct support just to live and provide for my family. And I make more than most in the industry. It's a burden to provide food, shelter, even small creature comforts for me and my family. Do you know what it's like to go into a Wal Mart and buy only Wal Mart brands, cooking Wal Mart meat in Wal Mart pans? This kind of struggle affects self-confidence and job performance. It's almost impossible to talk about just one issue in with this lifestyle because it is a vicious circle. Lack of money creates an unhappy living environment, which affects worker moods. From helping an individual to order a Big Mac to helping them wash themselves, our attitude affects everyday life for our individuals.

I often eat the same thing repetitively, for a week, two weeks, sometimes a month at a time just to make ends meet. Last week I bought a pack of markers and after all my financial responsibilities, I was left with \$15 or \$20 for nearly two weeks. I do this work because I love it. But I am tired of working for poverty wages, and never fully understanding why the most expensive care setting in our state, still can provide the independence and dignity it says it does for consumers, while at the same time paying such low wages to workers.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me. I urge you to support HB 2684 because it's time that workers like myself got a raise, and legislators understood exactly what this expensive form of supports is paying for.