

Debbie Price Testimony

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Sanchez, Vice Chair Olson, members of the committee, my name is Debbie Price, and I am Direct Support Provider at Eastco Diversified Services Inc, I am here to testify in favor of HB 2684, which help my clients to receive the care they deserve, and to my coworkers the respect and living wage that all DSP's should have. I would love to be telling you my testimony in person, but today I need to work a 19 hours shift, and every minute that I can sleep will help me to go through my day.

I have been working in this industry for 35 years with few exceptions, but I always come back to work as a DSP because I love to care for people. There is not many long term DSP in this industry because it is a demanding job with such low wages. I'm currently sharing a house with my husband, and the whole family of my daughter. We are sharing the house to be able to meet our ends every month. With my salary as a DSP I am able to cover the utilities bills, but not the rent of the house. I'm not making a living wage regardless of have over 3 decades of experience.

On the 35 years of experience, I have acquired several different types of skills to provide the best care possible to my clients and support them to have a meaningful life. The turnover in this industry is insanely high which leads to not having continuous care for our clients and a vicious circle of constantly training new workers all the time. This problem directly affects my clients who always ask before I leave work "are you coming back?" with a disquiet tone and fearful face of don't know what kind of treatment or uncertain future they will face if I don't come back. Regardless of how tired, frustrated, annoyed I am at the end of my shift I take a little time to reassure them that I will be back and we will meet their needs together.

During my experience working in this industry when we are understaffed usually creates big roadblocks to meet outing goals. Currently I have 5 clients , 4 of them are in sight all the time. When we need to go for an outing goal, I planned it in advance all the logistics trying to think in all the possibilities that could happen before, during, and after the outing because lately I have been the only worker who take them out of the house. For example, if my clients goals are to go out for dinner and ice cream, and I'm the only DSP everything become group activities leaving almost no room for mistakes. If all my clients are in the middle of eating their meal and one of them needs to go the bathroom, everyone needs to go, and it is interrupting the meal for everyone because I cannot leave some of my clients eating while I took only one to the bathroom. This should not happen because we need to be two staff to take the group to the outing, but I do it so that my clients doesn't miss their outing goal which it is very important for their lives how my clients show it. I am known as the outing queen because when I have a fully staffed house and I could have another coworker with me we took our clients everywhere such as long day trips to the beach, mountains and other type of attractions that they loved. Since we have been understaffed the outing become really close by the house and it takes more effort. I fully capable of do it, but why the outing of my clients need to be affected by inexperienced workers or reduce the quality of care to the minimum when this industry already received good

money, and we don't know where the money goes. I see how my company expand and gives good salaries to management, but to the clients and workers we only receive the crumbs.

It is imperative to support HB 2784 because our clients deserve a stable workforce that can make a career of it with living wages, so they cannot keep having an unpredictable future nor a meaningful life. Clients, workers, and taxpayers we need to know exactly where the money is allocated to make companies accountable of the substandard level of care that people with I/DD are receiving while it is put in place stronger protections/laws for workers who report abuse by these companies against our clients. If we hold accountable companies in how they spend tax revenue at the same time that we protect and support DSPs, we will set up our clients to have a meaningful life and uphold higher standards of care for everyone and not just exceptions like it is now.

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