

Memo

To: **Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services**
Co-Chair [Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward](#), Co-Chair [Representative Dan Rayfield](#) and
Members of the Committee

From: Jeffrey Witherspoon, Direct Support Professional, Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.

Date: March 28, 2017

Subject: **SB5526 - Department of Human Services - Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities**

Good morning. My name is Jeffery Witherspoon. I am a Direct Support Professional (DSP) and I work for Partnerships in Community Living. I am here today to share with you some of my feelings and experiences as a front line Support Professional.

I have worked in this field for several years as a DSP for different employers and in different cities. I have also spent time working in the mental health field.

The company I work for today has provided me with a very different kind of working experience. I have found my home here despite the challenges other providers and DSP's are facing in this industry. This is my chosen career and I plan on being here for years to come. The environment I work in now is supportive and totally devoted to respecting the choices of the people we support.

I currently work with a great team, they are my friends and coworkers and well meaning people, but they have been influenced by two major things: Wages and turnover among DSPs. Those things are obviously connected. Despite the amazing environment I currently work in, my co-workers leave because they can find a better paying job in the fast food industry or at a grocery store. This turnover causes chaos in the lives of the people we support. There is tremendous fear and uncertainty for the people we support every time a new DSP walks into their lives. What was once a stable life, is often thrown upside down and backwards because someone that does not know them may now be helping them with making it through their day and their very personal supports.

Turnover also causes pressures on co-workers. There is way too much overtime. The cost of re-training has got to be very expensive. The teams I work with are totally focused on making those pressures transparent to the people we support, but there are serious factors when a DSP is considering a career and supporting their own families.

Again, the impact of DSP turnover on the people supported is a hard thing for me to watch. We do everything we can to ease transitions and make people's lives as unaffected as possible, but there is only so much that can be done. People naturally become very upset, their world is influenced in a bad way outside of their control, and the intensity of our support has to be increased as well. This makes it harder, more expensive, and complex for everyone. It also can be avoided, but it will take help and major support from decision makers.

In closing, I would implore lawmakers to do just one thing: See what we see. Come visit people in their homes. Talk to people and the DSPs supporting them. Hear their stories. The truth is very clear and needs to be evident. Better wages, better careers, better training. All of this adds up to a single thing - A better life for those we support and for everyone involved. Thank you for your time.