

**To:** Joint Subcommittee on Human Services: Co-chair Senator Lee Beyer, Co-chair Representative Rob Nosse, Senator Dallas Heard, Senator Rob Wagner, Representative Cedric Hayden, Representative Andrea Salinas, Representative Sheri Schouten, & Representative Duane Stark

**From:** Alexandra Miles, Direct Support Professional, Shangri-La

**Date:** February 15, 2019

I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to present my testimony today. I have prepared my words, but I am speaking from my heart. I am a Direct Support Professional for Shangri-La. That means I have the honor of doing a job everyday where my roles and responsibilities change in any given moment. As a support staff, I am a teacher. I am a mentor. I am a confidant. I am an advocate, a chef, a baker, a plumber, a nurse's aide, a seamstress, a dance partner, a protector, and in the evening, I am a mother singing a lullaby. My role changes constantly depending on the situation and the needs and wants of the individuals I support. Although you are hearing my words, I am confident that this sentiment is true for my fellow colleagues. It has been a privilege to have worthwhile work supporting the most important, fragile members of our society.

However, I am here today to say that I can no longer afford to work here. I have a family of my own to support. Frankly, because of my low wage and living expenses in Oregon, I am considering moving out of state so that I can continue this work I love. I've done my budget line by line. I do not make it each month unless I work extra shifts or sell crafts I have made on the side. I don't take vacations. I drive an 11-year-old hand-me-down car from my grandmother and I pray every day that I don't get a flat tire, because to replace it, is something I simply cannot afford. My partner is a good man, but has suffered injuries and is unable to contribute to the family financially at this time. There is not a line item in our family's budget that allows our 16-year-old son to participate in extracurricular activities like band or the swim team. I have considered working for Sprint in a telemarketing sales job or going back to the front desk of a hotel because I just do not make enough. I am topped out at the wage I can earn in this position that I hold so dear, and still it cannot sustain the needs of my family.

I'm asking you today to please help me stay in this job that allows me to provide the best care possible to people who get their services from Shangri-La. It is fulfilling and worthwhile work and I have developed deep connections with the people I support. They depend on me and

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they are adversely affected when me and other DSPs are no longer able to continue to support them due to our low wages.

I believe that quality care can only be delivered by people with a strong mind, body, and spirit, and Direct Support Professional deserve fair and just compensation. Please help me and other DSPs continue to do the work that we love by providing the funding that is needed so that we can earn a living wage. Thank you again for your valuable time and the opportunity for me to present today.