



A non-profit organization that provides housing and whole-life support services to people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities.

24 hour – Supported Living – In Home Supports

February 18, 2021

To: Rep Williams, Chair, House Committee on Human Services

From: Sarah Frazzini, Benco Executive Director

RE: Support for HB 2964--Set rates that allow agencies to pay direct support professionals an average of 150 percent of state minimum wage.

Chair Williams and members of the committee:

Benco provides essential services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in 3 service settings; 24-hour residential, supported living, and in-home supports. In each of these service settings we rely on our Direct Support Professional work force to provide the greatest level of care, performing highly skilled interactions and person-centered support as they have been trained.

Providing a safe, secure, and high quality of life honoring personalized supports and self determination drive the work that we do each day. We can do this best when there is stability and consistency in our workforce. Unfortunately, that is not the case and has been our struggle for decades.

Benco is thankful for the positive changes and momentum that the legislature has been dedicated to over the last 5 years. However, it remains a high priority to make a long-term change that is tied to the minimum wage increase. The small increases which have been approved in previous legislative sessions have not provided the stability that we need. It should be noted that there is great inequity in pay for services which needs to be addressed between a PSW and a DSP. Our DSP workforce is paid a significantly lower amount than the PSW who does the same job in the same service setting as our DSP's. This is a complex issue and HB2964 will better address setting a more appropriate funding level to allow for DPS's to be paid an average of 150% of minimum wage.

Benco's current starting wage is set at \$12.21/hour. We have 85 DSP's as of today and our average DSP wage is \$15.96. Each time minimum wage increases, we struggle to

make the necessary changes to our wage scales to be able to offer just above minimum wage. In the 2020 year, Benco's turnover rate was at 50% with the majority of employees separating voluntarily after only being employed a few days to 2 years. Upon separation the feedback collected confirms that the low rate of pay is the key reason for leaving.

"The responsibility of a DSP is serious and very important. We are responsible for the safety, health, and happiness of another human being. We love our jobs and making a difference in someone's life is so gratifying. Most DSPs leave because the responsibilities of the job do not come close to the amount we are paid. I love my job and I know the huge impact on the residents I care for, but I suffer financially and live paycheck to paycheck. I regularly see the sadness of how a person is affected by losing DSPs."

Please demonstrate your support of this vulnerable and historically underserved population. People experiencing intellectual and developmental disabilities need a stable workforce. They need to access the services they are entitled to. The dedicated DSP's have been the ones to take on such an important role through the pandemic. They are our frontline hero's, showing up to ensure protection and safety throughout turbulent times and need to be paid a professional wage.

I urge you to support HB2964.