

TO: Joint Ways and Means Committee On Human Services

FROM: Gwen Whelton, Family Member

DATE: 3/2/2023

SUBJECT: HB2457 & HB2056

Co-Chair Senator Campos and Co-Chair Representative Valerama and members of the Committee. I am a parent to a gentleman - Christopher. Christopher is 27 and has intellectual disabilities as well as physical disabilities.

Christopher has Cerebral palsy, a seizure disorder, cortical blindness, microcephaly, and Angelman syndrome.

Christopher doesn't walk or talk, and requires full assistance for bathing, dressing, and feeding. He has a g-tube.

The care Christopher requires may seem minor - bathing, dressing, changing, feeding, transferring, g-tube feeds.....but that is his daily needs, that does not account for the more soft skills a DSP needs while working with my son - one of the most important is interaction. Christopher doesn't speak and does not have formal language (he loves to be included in anything happening), Another more critical skill is having a subtle watchful eye that would indicate something is amiss. Whether it is that he is uncomfortable due to his hip problem, he is hungry, he is starting into a seizure phase, he is developing a migraine, he is hot or cold (his thalamus doesn't work so he cannot

regulate his body temperature). Believe me when I say Christopher is a job. He is a full-time job. All the while the DSP must continue to provide day-to-day activities that keep him interacting and being a part of his community.

I am asking for us to fund HB 2457 this bill will increase wages to 150% of the Minimum Wage + 1% Paid. And what about this additional 1% paid leave tax. I find this impact a “one step forward and two back”.

It is important that we make available a wage that will attract people and reward the ones that have stayed in this profession. That is why I am asking you to consider ODDS's POP 132. It will allow providers to give increases that are much needed. I can't imagine doing what they do at the wage they make. I did the work because I loved my son. They do it because they have a calling. They are not tied to a COLA. They are at the mercy of what you decide their services are worth. Providers cannot shoulder all of the CPI issues and not have some relief from the state.

We need to add value to the work a DSP does and the service they provide. DSP's are required to learn so many things about different people in their care - because no one is the same, and no disability is the same.

It has taken me 27 years to be an expert on Christopher. It requires multiple people to learn what I have struggled for

years to learn and DSPs have to learn it in days or weeks. The training they receive and the knowledge they have is incredibly deep and the compassion needed is beyond words.

Because of the skill level needed to provide support to my son, I am scared and heartsick when a DSP leaves. They leave not because they don't like the work. They leave because they have family obligations that need to be met.

In this country, we help people who need additional assistance, like Christopher. We give them health insurance and provide safety and help with homes for them. But what about the population who have the calling to do this type of work? They need to have a wage where they can provide for their families, have time off, and not have to work additional hours or jobs to supplement their income.

We need to stop the revolving door. We need to understand that we are running out of trained valuable assets. What will we do when there is no one to care for people like my son? I know that I am at an age where my son will most likely outlive me and I am afraid of the lack of support shown to this sector therefore I worry about my son's future. This labor force is suffering from a shortage of these much-needed workers. If we do not make the

wage viable...I wouldn't want to do this work. We need to increase the wage to add value to the work.

We need to support ODDS's POP 132 and Bill HB 2457. I want stability in the workforce not just for my son but for others just like him and for the people who love them and the workers who give so much.