

Cristal Testimony 2/4/26

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Starr, members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Cristal DeJarnac and I am a personal support worker and the President of the Homecare Division of SEIU Local 503.

When I testified before this committee a few weeks ago, I told you that low wages in this work economically unsustainable. I told you that workers are living in their cars, selling plasma, and working two and three jobs just to get by. That has not changed.

What has changed is that this bill is now focused specifically on intellectual and developmental disability services. And I want to explain why that focus makes sense.

The problems in DD are more serious than anywhere else in the system. There is almost no transparency in how public dollars are spent. There are no minimum standards for how workers are treated. And while some providers are doing the right thing, others, including large for profit companies, are taking advantage of this lack of oversight to make huge profits by pocketing Medicaid funds that should go to high quality services and worker wages and benefits.

The wage gap in DD is stunning. Workers at some agencies make \$30 an hour. Workers at other agencies doing the exact same work make barely above minimum wage. The rate model assumes fair pay and good benefits for all DSPs. But without standards, there is nothing to make sure that money gets to the people doing the work.

I have heard the opposition say this bill is just "process, not pay." But I have been in this fight long enough to know that pay without accountability does not work either. We have watched the state invest in rate increases that go straight to profit instead of to workers. What good is more money if there are no rules about where it goes?

They also say this bill gives too much power to an unelected board. But what this bill actually does is bring workers to the table for the first time. Workers alongside people who rely on DD services, providers, alongside the state, building standards together. That is not a power grab. That's a smart way to build good policy.

In my years on the bargaining team, I have heard story after story from workers who love this work but cannot survive on what it pays. The people we support deserve a stable workforce. Workers deserve dignity. And taxpayers deserve to know that public dollars are being spent responsibly.

This committee heard me a few weeks ago. I am asking you to act now. Please vote yes on SB 1505. Thank you.