

From: Barbara Lee <bkldm22@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, February 22, 2023 4:24 PM

To: jkitchel@leg.state.vt.us

Subject: [External] Letter from State Program Standing Committee for DDSD

[External]

Dear Senator Kitchel,

The State Program Standing Committee for the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) urges the Vermont Legislature to approve an additional 10% funding to address a crisis in the workforce.

The lack of workers has plagued many programs since the onset of COVID, but has particularly affected Vermonters with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The average vacancy rate across Developmental Service agencies rose from 16.4% in October, 2021, to 24.1% a year later, with rates ranging from 4.6% to 50.6%. Think of that last figure-- that means people served by that program are without direct support workers half of the time! Employees have been heroic in filling in for one another to provide safety, but that has resulted in even greater stress on the support system.

What do these vacancy rates mean for the people served and their families? People with developmental disabilities, who go without their direct support professionals (DSP), cannot go into their community or to work. Instead, they may be stuck at home. A parent may need to give up a job to be able to care for a son or daughter. This can lead to a drop in family income, as well as a change in family dynamics. For example, in one family, this resulted in the family's reluctant decision to leave Vermont to move closer to supportive family out of state.

Without workers, there can be no opportunity for respite. This raises burnout and frustration, damaging the relationship between the people served and those providing their care, whether families or direct support providers. When DSP were asked: "What would help you remain in the direct care field, 74% said "higher wages." Nearly 60% of direct support staff said they cannot live on their salary.

The most important strategy for retaining workers has been an increase in salary. Last year an 8% increase was greatly appreciated, but still has not resulted in filling the gap in numbers of workers needed. Direct support professionals need an increase in pay that doesn't result in an actual pay cut because of inflation. In the Governor's 2023 budget, Developmental Services are level funded - in essence a cut to the system of support for the most vulnerable Vermonters.

Please help stabilize the Developmental Disabilities Services workforce by a 10% increase in funding. Thank You.

Sincerely,

State Program Standing Committee for the Developmental Disabilities Services Division

Bethany Drum and Barbara Lee, Co-Chairs

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