

April 20, 2023

Dear Chairs Kitchel and Lyons and Members of the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare,

This letter comes from recipients of Developmental Disability services, parents of recipients, community advocates, and service providers for people receiving developmental services. We serve on the Developmental Services Workforce Workgroup, formed by DAIL, and are tasked with understanding the workforce shortage in developmental services, and recommending solutions. **We urge the Vermont Legislature to approve an increase of 10% in the Medicaid rate to address the crisis in the workforce, and to have wages keep pace with inflation.**

As I am sure you know, the lack of workers has plagued many programs since the onset of COVID but has particularly affected Vermonters with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Last year over a third of developmental services staff left their jobs. The number one reason that people left and continue to leave their jobs is the low rate of pay. Direct care workers in the developmental services field cannot support themselves and cannot afford their housing costs on the low rates of pay. In a survey last year **59%** of direct care development disability workers said they did not earn enough at their jobs to support themselves! How can we expect people to work in this important field if they cannot support themselves on their wage?

The average vacancy rate across Developmental Service agencies is 24%. This means that a quarter of the services that have been determined to be necessary for health and safety are not being provided.

How does this affect us?

- Some of us have absolutely no staff for our family members for over a year and a half.
- Some of us are self-managing our funds and agreeing to have less hours of necessary coverage to pay our workers a higher wage. Even with the higher wages we are still paying our workers less than people are paid at places like McDonalds.

- When we do not have staff, people with developmental disabilities are isolated at home. This is bad for our health and our mental health.
- Parents have had to quit their jobs so they can care for a family member who is stuck at home with no staff.
- Without staff, family caregivers are not able to address their own healthcare needs (like getting to doctor's appointments). When family caregivers become sick because we are not able to take care of ourselves, this will inevitably be far more costly.

This is a crisis. We are at a breaking point. The pandemic has been hard on us all. More of us are experiencing anxiety and depression as we struggle with isolation and our declining health and safety. As the needs increase for people with developmental disabilities it is even more important to have well-qualified, experienced staff.

We know that a wage increase is not the only thing that needs to happen to resolve the workforce crisis. We also know that without a wage increase, we will be facing the same workforce crisis years down the road.

Please help stabilize the Developmental Disabilities Services workforce by approving a 10% increase in funding, and by committing to maintaining that the Medicaid rates will keep pace with inflation.

Thank you,
Developmental Services Workforce Workgroup

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