

RYAN A. BIZZARRO, CHAIRMAN

414 MAIN CAPITOL BUILDING
P.O. BOX 202003
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17120-2003
(717) 772-2297
FAX: (717) 780-4767



HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

WEBSITE: WWW.PAHOUSE.COM/POLICYCOMMITTEE

EMAIL: POLICY@PAHOUSE.NET

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Living Wage for Support Professionals

Tuesday, April 11, 2023 | 12:00 p.m.

Representative Tarik Khan

12:00 p.m. Welcome, Introductions & Roundtable

12:05 p.m. Discussion

G.N. Janes, Chief Executive Officer
Valley Community Services

Michael Anderson, Legislative Advocate
The Arc of Philadelphia

Carrin Butts, Direct Support Professional

Dr. Josie Badger, Founder
Badger Consulting Inc

Q & A with Legislators

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Michael Anderson
Homeowner: Merion Station, Pa.

My name is Michael Anderson. Thank you for allowing me to speak today on an extremely important issue -- increasing wages for DSPs (direct support professionals). I know the importance of this issue from personal experience. I am a 41-year-old man from Merion Station, Pennsylvania, who has cerebral palsy. I own my own home with two other men, both of whom also have physical disabilities. This is not a group home. Because of my disability, I need 24-hour care, 7 days a week, to handle the activities of daily living -- getting out of bed, going to the bathroom, getting a shower, getting dressed, eating my meals, doing my laundry, cleaning up my room, and going out into the community, where I work, volunteer, go to concerts and sporting events, and visit family.

Without this support, I would have to go to a nursing home, where the level of care and the level of freedom is much more restricted. Nursing homes are only required to provide 2.7 hours of direct care per day. And they don't provide the support I need to leave the institution and participate in the community. They are places that people go to die, and I don't want to be one of them.

For the last several years, even before COVID, I have had a lot of trouble hiring and keeping attendants. The main reason is that the wages for DSPs haven't kept up with wages in the community. People working at Target and McDonalds make much more. Most of my attendants only get \$12 an hour, without benefits. Increasingly, I have had to rely on my father to fill in the gaps -- he's 68 years old and he's not getting any younger. And lots of people don't even have family members who can be backups. To that point, I want to stress that the idea of any "Family Safety Net" behind the Home-Community Based Services is a myth.

- My story is not uncommon, and reflects the DSP crisis that all people with supportive disabilities services are facing every single day.
- We know that, today, there are over 4,000 people who lost ID Waiver services, nearly 10% of the total number people served across PA, with 90% of providers citing the DSP crisis as the primary reason they can't deliver their service.
- There are people waiting for a home staffing agency, waiting for a supported employment staff, waiting for staff so they can attend their day programs again.
- They are instead, sitting at home without someone to give them a shower, regressing in negative behaviors, and requiring their family members to quit jobs to care for them- all effects that will ultimately cost other publically funded programs.

I call on the Pennsylvania legislature to give DSPs a living wage, at least \$20 an hour. You'll hear our disability services field collective ask of \$430 Million, but remember this will still be the minimum to MAYBE keep this field from collapsing. I want to remind us all, the responsibility to care for the Commonwealth's most vulnerable through these supportive programs for people with Intellectual Disabilities is written into the Pennsylvania's Constitution and falls squarely on how we adequately fund the ID Waiver system. A system that already has

not held up that responsibility, with an additional 12,000 people with disabilities, eligible, and approved, on a waitlist today.

I don't want to choose between a nursing home and my aging parents. I'd rather be able to live independently and let my parents live that way, too.

G.N. Janes
CEO Valley Community Services

Good Afternoon,

My name is G. N. Janes. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Valley Community Services, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to support persons with intellectual disabilities and autism. We currently support 160 Pennsylvanians in various capacities across 9 counties throughout the commonwealth. Our organization completes its mission with the help of 317 Direct Support Professionals, who work in a myriad of ways to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities and autism live everyday lives in their communities.

I have spent approximately 23 years working in this field; working in maintenance, compliance, operations, as an executive and as a Direct Support Professional. Like almost every other similar organization, we have relied almost exclusively on our state and federal partners' distribution of Medicaid dollars to complete our mission. And, like almost every similar organization, we have historically struggled to maintain a full complement of employees. I often say, "we were short staffed before it was cool." There have always been cracks in our staffing foundation. We patched them together as best we could with the Herculean efforts of a devoted group of front-line workers and a philosophy of "completing the mission."

Unfortunately, this post pandemic era feels different. We are now short approximately 120 staff. Direct Support Professionals are being ground down and stuck working grueling hours to keep those we support safe. For every 100 hours a Valley Community Services DSP is working, fully 20 are overtime. We are unable to support the number of people we want to, simply because we do not have the staff. We have been forced to close residential homes and a day program in a rural part of Central Pennsylvania for precisely the same reason. Our once vibrant In Home and Community Supports Program, has gone from over 140 participants to just 27. We are not alone. According to a recent survey, the statewide turnover rate for DSPs is 37%, and the vacancy rate is 24%, down from a peak of 40%. That is not cause for celebration, rather, it is caused by the contraction of supports that established providers are able to offer.

The job has never been easy. I am amazed that Direct Supports Professionals like Carrin, here, have stuck with us through low pay, high turnover, and demanding work hours. But for their altruism, our brittle system would be completely fissured. We owe them a living wage because they have dedicated their lives to something greater than themselves. A colleague recently recounted a story to me about a mother of a person with an intellectual disability confronting an elected official. She asked him: "How can we expect a DSP to deliver a high quality of life to our families, when the wages they receive do not ensure a quality of life for them?" I thank you for listening to us and hope that you might endeavor to empower us to ensure that very quality to Direct Supports Professionals across the commonwealth.

G. N. Janes
Chief Executive Officer
Valley Community Services

Dr. Josie Badger
Testimony 4.11.23

Good afternoon,

If you do not know me, I am Dr. Josie Badger, but the doctor is silent. I am an entrepreneur, business owner, homeowner, voter, wife, and mother. But I am not here to talk about my accolades, I'm here to talk about what allows me to be all of those things.

As an individual with a significant physical disability, my independence and success rely on the availability of high quality, dependable, and compassionate personal care attendants.

I have a genetic condition called Congenital Myasthenic Syndrome which, in short, causes all of my voluntary muscles to be weakened with use. Therefore, I use a power wheelchair, a ventilator, and 24-hour care to be able to live independently and authentically.

In order to continue to live the life that I've chosen, I rely on the care made available through medical assistance and waivers. As a person with a physical disability that does not include an intellectual disability diagnosis, I was limited to the OBRA waiver and then moved to community health choices. Being on the waivers available for people with just a physical disability diagnosis means a more limited scope of supports and services, lower reimbursement rates, and significantly lower pay for my personal care attendants. In spite of the level of care that I need and the extensive support provided by my aides, my diagnosis prevents them from receiving a livable wage.

I cannot compete with places like McDonald's or Walmart with my starting salary being less than \$12 an hour with no benefits. My longest working aide, who has been working for me for around 10 years only now makes \$15 an hour and that is the peak hourly rate so there is no chance for additional raises in the future.

My life and success is in the hands of people who cannot afford to work for me. Even if I were to hire them full-time, it is not a livable wage. Since the pandemic the care crisis has grown exponentially. Individuals who worked in the field because they loved it can no longer afford to do this work. The increase in the cost of living and higher entry-level pay in other jobs has made direct service provider work less desirable. This leaves me with individuals who cannot obtain other employment.

There is no wonder why people with disabilities are often taken advantage of by their own care providers. As an individual who knows the high turnover rate in caregiving and the devastating impact that can occur when a caregiver leaves, a lot of things get swept under a rug to maintain our support. Neglect, theft, and emotional, physical, and sexual abuse may be kept a "secret" so that the individual knows that they will have care to get up the next morning.

These caregivers often have full access to bank accounts, credit cards, medications and yet often we can only hire individuals who cannot keep other jobs. At least three of my aides have stolen medications from me and there is likely much more that has happened that I am not aware of.

Safety, security, and lives should not be placed in the hands of individuals who cannot get a better job and further, our diagnoses should not dictate whether we are able to pay our aides a fair wage. Changes

need to be made so that all caregivers make at least a livable wage with cost-of-living adjustments built in.

If Pennsylvania wants to pride itself in supporting Pennsylvanians, then it is time to invest in the largest minority group in the state, people with disabilities.