

February 20, 2018

Address
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Dear Representative (or Senator) _____,

I am contacting you because I am concerned about the direct care staff working to help people with disabilities who are served by Michigan's mental health system.

We all know that providers who employ direct care staff cannot recruit or retain adequate staff to meet the needs of the people for whom they are responsible. The consumers in the mental health system are sometimes getting no services or getting less than they need. Staff are burning out because they have to work so many hours as a result of being short staffed. When they get burned out they quit, creating a vicious cycle of less than adequate staffing. Residential providers responsible for this population are terminating services to people in need because they don't have enough staff. Other providers have gone out of business for the same reason.

The direct care workforce represents the backbone of the mental health system. These are the staff responsible for caring for those with the most severe disabilities in our system. They provide intimate physical care, they literally deal with life and death decisions, they deal with highly aggressive individuals who cannot express themselves in other ways - and they live in poverty.

These direct care staff are the infrastructure of the mental health system and that component of the system of care is crumbling. Providers cannot fully care for those for whom we are currently responsible and we do not have the capacity to respond to the needs of the older children coming into the mental health system.

We, the State of Michigan, need to invest in these staff if people are to have a good quality of life. Providers need to – at least - be in a competitive position with McDonald's, Costco, Target and others. We also need a strong benefits package if we want them to stay in this workforce.

The Section 1009 Report, developed at the directive of our State Legislature in the FY 2015-16 State Budget and designed to create a set of recommendations regarding the direct care workforce shortage, calls for a starting wage of \$2.00 per hour above the minimum wage – or \$11.25 per hour this year.

Last year the Legislature partially funded a fifty cents per hour wage increase for direct care staff and required providers to make up the difference. This, of course, amounted

to an unfunded mandate and is not sustainable in the future. The Legislature needs to fund these positions fully if you care about consumers receiving adequate care. Currently services are being terminated and others are receiving their services from an unreliable work force. Only the State of Michigan has the resources to respond to this crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue and your strong interest in the quality of life for people supported by Michigan's mental health system.

Sincerely,