

Direct Care Workers offer appreciation to MI Legislature, Governor Wage supplement extended through September 30

For many years, Michigan's Direct Care Workers have struggled to bring home sufficient wages to justify the career paths they have chosen. While they feel passionately about serving individuals with developmental disabilities and mental illness, enthusiasm doesn't pay the bills. At an average starting wage of \$11.44 per hour—less than what they could make at Starbucks or Wal-Mart—Direct Care Workers spend long days and nights providing personal support to people whose needs make them vulnerable. It's heavy work, and it takes a heavy toll.

That is why it has been so very important for our state to ensure Direct Care Workers are adequately compensated for the work they do. These workers are funded through state Medicaid dollars, which means it's not possible for their employers to simply raise prices and pay them more. State legislative action is necessary.

This week, we saw the necessary action occur, as the Governor signed a temporary Direct Care Worker wage supplemental, passed by the Legislature last week. The supplemental extends a temporary increase approved last year, offering each qualifying Direct Care Worker \$2.25 per hour through September 30, 2021. On behalf of Michigan's Direct Care Workers—and the families, individuals, and agencies that need them so much—we offer our heartfelt thanks.

We appreciate the freedom to keep these workers on the job, delivering the services our families—and our economy—need so urgently. Particularly now, as Michigan continues to reel from the various impacts of COVID-19, it's important to ensure each and every individual, family and business is adequately supported. Now, as we look to the future, we see hope on the horizon.

We see state policy leaders talking about how to make this temporary wage supplemental permanent in the FY 2022 state budget. We hear crucial dialogue about the future of Michigan's Direct Care workforce, and how to strengthen it over time. We know there are exciting opportunities on the horizon and are proud to be part of a solution that's long overdue.

Our advocacy efforts are only beginning. Thanks to our dedicated coalition of voices who collectively speak up on behalf of individuals in need of extra support, we are able to tell the stories all of us need to hear. We can share the experiences of Michigan's Direct Care Workers—and the people who benefit from their work—and urge our state's policy agenda to include them more fully.

Ultimately, our vision is to create a robust base of Direct Care Worker talent, offer this crucial workforce a means of growing and advancing, and ensure each and every Michigan resident in need of support can easily find it. Fortunately, it seems the state Legislature and Governor share this vision. For that we offer our gratitude and our commitment to moving forward together.

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