

Letters from our readers

Raise pay rates for direct support staff

To the Editor:

There's an often-unspoken crisis underway for providers of service to people with disabilities in Minnesota, and it is about the people who are the lifeblood of any industry - employees. Lagging pay rates for direct support professionals (DSPs) impact our ability to both attract quality workers and to retain them. Other industries can increase sales and raise prices, but ours is dependent on set payment rates from the state government, which dictates the fees received for services.

The lack of support (or lack of increases) from the state Legislature has left our industry with an estimated 8,700 open positions statewide. So, the Minnesota Legislature is being asked to support a 4

percent increase in these rates to help serve people with disabilities.

"It is hard to lose able, talented and passionate employees because they can earn more flipping burgers at a local fast-food shop," said Mike Burke, the president of the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR). MOHR is one of the organizations leading the charge to raise pay rates by supporting the Best Life Alliance, a Minnesota coalition of advocates.

Best Life Alliance Chairperson and parent Pam Gonnella noted the importance of investing in home and community-based services, such as the DAC and its staff, which assist thousands of individuals with disabilities across the

state, including her own daughter. "If we don't address the workforce shortage, the entire system will fall apart," said Gonnella. "People's lives are at stake if they cannot get the care they need. Just like maintenance of our highways and bridges, we must invest now so the system is sustainable and so people with disabilities have the consistent, quality care they deserve."

Please contact your state legislators and share your support for the Best Life Alliance's 4 percent campaign. People with disabilities are counting on you.

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