

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2550
Social Services Budget Committee

To: Will Carpenter, Chair and Members of the House Social Services Budget Committee
From: Kaela Harrington, Direct Support Professional, TARC Inc.
Date: February 12, 2020

My name is Kaela Harrington. I have been a Direct Support Professional for 3 years, two of those have been with TARC. The past year at TARC I have been supporting people not only with Intellectual and developmental disabilities but Dementia and/or Alzheimer's as well. I try to improve their day to day lives, help them gain independence, empower them and let them know they are valued.

People ask me why I do what I do, they know it can be stressful and that the pay is extremely low. What they do not know is the connections that DSPs build with the individuals we support and the joy those people bring to our lives. On a typical day we make art together, and I might read to them or we write together to share information about our day. We continually look at pictures of their families and friends to help with their memory. Sometimes we will go over life skills they may have forgotten or never learned such as using a microwave, putting on a coat, washing dishes, or sweeping a floor.

I also help them with their most basic personal needs. In the restroom, some need total support and require two persons to help or the use of a Hoyer lift. At lunch, I totally support those who cannot feed themselves while encouraging and teaching more able-bodied persons to prepare their lunches independently. A few individuals that we support cannot eat by mouth and require tube feedings. Some of these duties can be even more difficult by challenging behaviors. Despite the challenges, seeing the individuals I support thrive and having them feel cared for is incredibly rewarding.

As much as I love my job it does become extremely hard and stressful doing what I do on the income I receive. I am a single mother to an amazing nine-year-old boy. I want to give him the world but sometimes I find myself struggling to give him the basics. It's hard deciding between paying a bill and getting what we need from the store. In the weeks where everything goes as planned, we manage. But, say one of us needs to see a doctor or dentist, the heater goes out, a tire pops, tags are due etc.... those are the weeks I dread, the weeks I know someone is not going to get paid.

I would love to continue doing what I do and being a Direct Support Professional for many years to come but as my expenses increase, I do not know if I can continue to support my family with my income. So please, for me and all the other DSPs who genuinely love what we do, support this bill. Thank you for your time.

