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NJ Coalition for a DSP Living Wage Observes ‘Direct Support Professional Recognition Week’ by Advocating for a Much-Needed Wage Increase for NJ DSPs

State Lawmakers Must Secure Funding for A Living Wage for the Thousands of Frontline Workers Who Provide the Essential Care that Enable Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to Live Meaningful Lives in Communities Across the Garden State

Trenton, NJ—With over 30,000 New Jersey children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities(I/DD) relying on Direct Support Professionals (DSP) to provide the necessary supports to live meaningful lives in their communities, the New Jersey Coalition for a DSP Living Wage is celebrating “DSP Recognition Week” by urging New Jersey lawmakers to remain committed to raising wages for this essential, but often forgotten, workforce.

DSPs play a vital role in New Jersey’s disability services system, meeting the physical, medical, behavioral, educational and social needs that enable individuals with I/DD to live as independently as possible in communities across the Garden State. While their highly-skilled work is demanding and complex, the average starting salary of DSPs in New Jersey is only \$10.50 an hour. Low wages are forcing many to work multiple jobs or receive public assistance just to make ends meet. The low compensation is also contributing to an approximately 44% turnover rate in the profession that is creating a mounting crisis in the delivery of care for individuals with I/DD.

“Many DSPs find themselves in the unenviable position of having to choose between the job they love and the financial needs of their own families, resulting in a turnover rate that exceeds most other job positions,” said Valerie Sellers, President & CEO of the New Jersey Association of Community Providers and Steering Committee Member of the NJ Coalition for a DSP Living Wage. “DSPs are the foundation of the community system of care. If we do not secure a living wage for these dedicated, highly-trained professionals, the current crisis will only deepen. The long-term sustainability of community based supports that enable people with I/DD to thrive in community settings is at risk.”

In June, the New Jersey Legislature and Governor Christie approved the first, small wage increase for DSPs in 11 years. While an important initial step, lawmakers need to raise wages by \$1.25 for the next five years to bring the starting salary to a competitive \$16.75 living wage.



“High turnover and vacancy rates stemming from low wages are disruptive and interfere with continuity of care that allows individuals with I/DD to lead healthy and productive lives in their communities,” said Tom Baffuto, Executive Director of The Arc of New Jersey and Coalition for a DSP Living Wage Steering Committee Member. “The Coalition is hopeful state leaders will remain committed to stabilizing the DSP workforce by enacting a fair living wage that values the critical and highly-skilled work that they do in New Jersey,” he said.

“DSPs are remarkable people who make significant sacrifices to support the people they work with,” continued Sellers. “It’s so much more than just a job. They are trusted friends and mentors who provide the assistance individuals with I/DD need to realize their potential. We are grateful for their impactful work not only during ‘DSP Recognition Week’ but every single day. They make lives better in communities across New Jersey and deserve to be fairly compensated for it. Our state lawmakers must act to make it happen,” she concluded.

DSP Recognition Week in New Jersey runs from September 10 through September 17, 2017.

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About NJ Coalition for a DSP Living Wage

The NJ Coalition for a DSP Living Wage is comprised of families, community provider agencies, Direct Support Professionals and, most importantly, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). These members share a common belief that individuals with I/DD deserve to live rich and meaningful lives as fully integrated members of our communities. Toward that end, Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), who play a critical role in meeting this objective, must be paid a living wage. For more information, visit <http://www.njdspcoalition.org/>.