

Testimony for the SC hearing on the DHHS budget, April 8, 2019.

Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to speak to you. I would like to share some information about my son and his living situation, as well as our experience with staffing. We have seen a dramatic rise in the challenges of finding and retaining staff over the past three years. The staff are crucial to my son living independently in the community and having a meaningful, safe and happy life.

1. I have been involved in identifying, hiring and training staff for my son for more than 7 years. He is 39 years old, and lives in the community in his own home in Ann Arbor, with 24/7 supports, called CLS or community living supports. My son has an intellectual disability, mild autism, and moderate behavioral needs. Seven years ago, he nearly died from Crohn's disease which is a lifelong, chronic medical condition that requires monthly hospital visits for treatment with immunosuppressant medications. His CLS, or home staff, are required to help him manage all his daytime activities, help with his shopping, food preparation, medication administration, and transport him to his volunteer jobs and activities in the community. My son's staff are paid an average of \$12.50 an hour, and are required to provide transportation in their own reliable car. They must carry above average insurance liability coverage. The CLS staff are not paid vacation time, sick time, personal time or have any other benefit. If they do not work for any reason, they are not paid. (Although our staff average \$12.50 an hour, most CLS workers in our county are employed by agencies with CMH contracts are paid at the rate of \$9.50-10 an hour, and they are exempt from the Living Wage ordinance that exists in Washtenaw County.)
2. Previously I had success hiring by referrals from other staff, and by advertising for students through the on line site at the University of Michigan. I also sent information directly to students through contacts that I had at EMU and U of M. This was successful in the beginning, but in the past two years I have not had a single person answer any University advertisement. (The University of Michigan now offers jobs on campus for \$15 an hour, and CLS cannot compete.)
3. Last year, I had three of our staff, all Social Work students at the University of Michigan, resign at the same time, because of school commitments. It left 56 hours, or seven shifts a week to cover. I used every resource available. I paid for advertisements on Care.com, Urban sitter, Indeed.com and Zip Recruiter. I directly emailed 90 people on Care. Com and had to explain to them exactly what the CLS job was, describe the type of work and the training. Most individuals on the site were interested in babysitting, not caring for a special needs adult. Of the 90 people, only 6 emailed me back. I was able to hire four people to work one or two shifts a week, and all of them had other full-time jobs. Although this was not ideal, it did help us get through a crisis. One year later, only two of the four individuals are still working for us.

4. Most of the CLS workers with prior training or experience work at least two jobs, in order to make enough money to live in or near Ann Arbor. Having another job commitment causes them to be limited in their availability, and they are often not able to do back up work. Likewise, students are usually not available for back up work due to class schedules.
5. In two instances in the last six months, in an emergency when our regular night staff was sick, I had to hire staff from a senior care agency and pay privately. This was not reimbursed by Medicaid.
6. On one occasion as a last resort, I used Craig's List for recruitment, and unfortunately two of the four individuals it attracted were either unable to pass the background check or were not qualified to work in the United States. The other two were dissuaded by the low pay.
7. I used Indeed.com to advertise for a supervisor, and was told repeatedly that the pay was below what they were already making, or that the lack of benefits was unacceptable. When I directly emailed individuals with resumes on the site, I was able to hire a supervisor, only to lose her six months later when she was recruited back by her former employer at a charter school. She was talented but did not have a college degree or hold a teaching certificate. She was recruited for a \$40,000 a year position with benefits and summers off work. There was no possibility that we could compete with the offer.
8. In Ann Arbor, local businesses within a two-mile radius of my son's home, all have signs that say they are hiring. Aldi's starts individuals at \$12.50 an hour with benefits, and Meijer's starts at \$12.70. Many of the individuals with profiles on the online sites for babysitting are advertising their services in the range of \$15-20 an hour.
9. For the most part, the salaries paid to our CLS workers are less than the local grocery stores. Furthermore, we require CPR, First Aid, Rights classes, training to work with special needs, and behavioral training. The CLS work is crucial to our children's health and safety, as well as their well-being and ability to function in the community.
10. I am currently at full staff, with 10 different individuals, all of whom have another job or go to school. When a staff is ill or cannot work their shift, the back up often falls to me, and sometimes my health interferes with me stepping in and providing care. In that case, when I am forced to use the emergency back-up, the agency that provides senior home care, I am forced to pay privately for their work, at \$25 an hour.
11. I am concerned that CLS work is extremely undervalued and underpaid in our community and throughout the State of Michigan. Because there is no "overtime" reimbursement in Medicaid, the staffing has to be structured with enough individuals to cover sick time for other staff without exceeding 40 hours a week. This means that an

individual requiring 24/7 staffing will have a lot of different people to interact with during their week in order to cover 168 hours of care. Behavior then suffers from inconsistency. It also necessitates a supervisor to do oversight, scheduling, training, track timesheets, and maintain training information. The cost of the supervisor further dilutes the hourly amount available for the CLS workers.

12. The neighborhood entry level jobs pay more than CLS. For students, it is probably easier to work a part time job close to campus; one that does not require CPR, First Aid and Rights classes. The checkout people at Aldi's or Meijer's do not have to take care of someone with medical needs, monitor a seizure, or report a rights violation if they witness a parent who may be disrespectful or acting in an abusive manner toward their child. The situation is simply, "someone else's responsibility." We expect our CLS staff to work independently, to think, react, and document these situations, and we are demanding that they do it well. We also require them to stay with their client until the next staff arrive, even if the relief person may be hours late. The CLS job is actually much more demanding than any of the other entry level jobs in the community, and, it is definitely more important.
13. In the past few years, many of the students interested in careers in human services, or in the medical field, who might have benefitted from the experience of doing CLS work are often taking positions with one of the multiple behavior companies that have cropped up as the result of new laws providing behavioral services to disabled children. As a behavior technician, the pay can be \$17 an hour, which is \$5-7 more per hour than usual CLS pay. I have had two staff who have left to take positions with a behavior therapy provider.
14. I am worried that as I age, I will be less available to be the backup that my son needs in order for him to continue to live independently. The competition for people to do entry level jobs in our community is fierce, and will only get worse.
15. There is another big elephant in the room. That is, the demand for direct care staff to work with our rapidly aging population of seniors, many of whom will need personal assistance in their homes, will rapidly increase over the next ten years. If we cannot hire and retain staff in the present, the future is very dismal. We need to fix the situation now, before the next big wave of individuals with home care needs further impacts the CLS market.
16. As our representatives in the legislature, it is up to you to rectify the situation. As families, we can speak for our vulnerable population and express our needs, but we are otherwise powerless. The local Community Mental Health agencies are unable to make any change in the reimbursement for direct care workers, but they have provided you with an in-depth analysis of the situation in their 1009 report. We need to pay our workers a living wage, recognize their value, and do it in a timely manner. This is the right thing to do, and now is absolutely the right time. It is incumbent on you, as our

elected representatives, to provide the funding for the CLS workforce, protect the needs of our disabled adult children, and allow them to continue to live independently in our community.

That has been the commitment of the State of Michigan since closing the institutions many years ago. We cannot go backwards. You must adequately fund the staffing needs to allow our children to continue to live dignified and meaningful lives as important members of our community.

Respectfully submitted,

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