

2019 -- S 0059

LC000241

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2019

JOINT RESOLUTION

RESPECTFULLY URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND HOSPITALS AND THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES TO INCREASE CERTAIN DIRECT WORKER WAGES

Introduced By: Senators DiPalma, Conley, Seveney, Coyne, and Paolino

Date Introduced: January 16, 2019

Referred To: Senate Finance

1 WHEREAS, An estimated 4,400 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities
2 are supported by the state in community-based settings; direct support professionals (DSPs),
3 personal care assistants (PCAs), and job coaches, are trained staff that are engaged in activities of
4 daily living and community/employment support; these employees earn wages that place them
5 and their families below the poverty level; and

6 WHEREAS, The average DSP wage in Rhode Island is approximately \$11 per hour,
7 which is below the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty threshold for a
8 family of 4; this workforce is often compelled to work many overtime hours or maintain a second
9 job to support their families; many have to rely on public benefits such as Medicaid and food
10 stamps, creating additional expenditures for state government; and

11 WHEREAS, Rhode Island has increased the minimum wage for the general workforce
12 from \$7.40 in 2012 to \$9.60 in 2016, and to \$10.10 in 2017, for a 36 percent increase in five
13 years. During the corresponding period, direct support professionals (DSPs) have seen their
14 combined average wages move from \$10.65 to \$10.82, or increase by 1.6 percent over 5 years.
15 Our neighboring states of Massachusetts and Connecticut saw increases in the minimum wage of
16 37.5 percent (to \$11 in 2017) and 22 percent (to \$10.10 in 2017) respectively. Over the same 5-
17 year period, these 2 states increased their DSP/PCA wage to \$14.56 and \$12.19 respectively,
18 compared with Rhode Island's \$10.82 per hour wage. And, Massachusetts has committed to
19 compensate a portion of their DSPs with a \$15.00/hour wage by 2018; and

1 WHEREAS, The lack of adequate wages for DSP employees who perform the
2 challenging work of supporting persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities results in
3 high employee turnover, estimated at 33 percent in Rhode Island; higher wages are proven to
4 reduce staff turnover, improving stability and quality of services while reducing employer
5 training costs; and

6 WHEREAS, Rising wages in several other sectors now mean, despite strenuous efforts to
7 recruit new DSP workers and job coaches, agencies are experiencing staff vacancy rates of up to
8 25 percent; excessive vacancies force employers to rely more on overtime, leading to staff
9 burnout and driving up costs; this growing hiring crisis impedes the ability of community
10 agencies to implement the state's obligations under the 2014 US Department of Justice
11 Disabilities Act RI Settlement Agreement; now, therefore be it

12 RESOLVED, That this General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence
13 Plantations hereby respectfully urges the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental
14 Disabilities and Hospitals to increase the base-payment rates for licensed developmental
15 disability organizations, an amount to be determined by the appropriations process, for the
16 purpose of raising wages for direct support professionals and job coaches that is implemented: (1)
17 By October 1, 2019; and (2) In a manner that meets specifications related to implementation and
18 reporting approved by the Director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental
19 Disabilities and Hospitals and the Secretary of Health and Human Services; and be it further

20 RESOLVED, That this General Assembly hereby further urges the Department of
21 Behavioral Healthcare, Development Disabilities and Hospitals to implement said increase in the
22 base-payment rates for licensed developmental disability organizations in a manner that results in
23 direct support professionals and job coaches earning a base wage of not less than \$15 per hour by
24 fiscal year 2022. The rate shall be adjusted annually by a percentage increase equal to the
25 Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) or a successor
26 index as calculated for the northeast region by the US Department of Labor; and be it further

27 RESOLVED, That this General Assembly hereby respectfully requests the Office of
28 Internal Audit within the Office of Management and Budget to conduct a vendor compliance
29 audit review after the implementation of the increase in base-rate payments in accordance with
30 this resolution; and be it further

31 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
32 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Governor of the State of Rhode Island, the
33 Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, the Office of
34 Internal Audit within the Office of Management and Budget, and the Executive Office of Health

1 and Human Services.

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