

House Committee on Finance and Appropriations
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Testimony of Michelle Moenter

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Chairwoman Carruthers, ranking member Liston and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee my name is Michelle Moenter and I am the Program Director for Empowering People – Summit County. I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to share my testimony.

I come to you today from a place of concern, perhaps desperation. You see I have spent my entire career working to help people with disabilities have a better quality of life. I personally have worked in this field for my entire adult career which equates to 26 years. In all of the time I have worked in this field I have never been able to support myself and my son with just one job. I have ALWAYS held two jobs for my entire adult life. That continues even today as the Program Director. People may ask why I wouldn't just find a higher paying job.... But the truth is ... this is my passion. Unfortunately my passion as well as other's passion for this field cannot change the issues within our system...In fact I have never seen the DD field in such a state of crisis. I feel that this system is on the verge of collapsing.

Because of my longevity in the field, I have seen a steep decline in our ability to provide services to individuals who truly deserve a good quality of life. In a system that is 100% funded by Medicaid, we are forced to work within the constraints of the system. Therefore, existing employees and employees that are hired are not being paid a fair wage for the amount of work and responsibility the position requires. Many people have come to realize this and have gone on to get other jobs that pay more and require less. As time has passed this has become a recurring theme among both new and veteran employees.

One employee who worked with me as a manager for twelve years left after feeling burnt out because of the amount of time he was spending working direct care as a salaried employee. He then went to work at a hospital as a tech making more money per hour and having fewer responsibilities with set hours. We cannot afford to lose these kinds of people who are truly

vested in the lives of the individuals we serve.

Another long-term employee has a son who receives services through Summit DD. Recently his son got a higher paying job at Amazon than he has working direct care for Empowering People. Frankly, this is demoralizing. There have been countless times where employees tell me that they enjoy working in our homes but they cannot afford to because they don't have gas money to get to work or can't afford a babysitter for their kids. People have told me repeatedly how they have to choose between buying groceries and buying Christmas presents for their kids. I completely understand where they are coming from because I too worked 2 jobs because I wanted what everyone wants for their children, which is to live in a decent home and go to a good school. We are putting employees in a position where they aren't able to support their families by working as a direct support professional.

In the end it's the individuals as well as the staff who suffer the consequences. Staff end up leaving to find a better paying job and the individuals in our homes see a revolving door of staff without any consistency from day to day. This in turn causes burn out among the staff that stay and cause the bare minimum to be done. Individuals who are used to going out with staff to enjoy their favorite activities are unable to do so because there simply isn't enough staff to take them. Individuals feel anxious and upset because someone who took care of them for years is suddenly gone. Staff feel torn between a job where they get fulfillment from taking care of others and being able to financially support their families. Because of the many reasons I have listed, I implore you to invest in this system and help to create an environment where staff and the individuals are able to thrive. Thank you.