

House Committee on Finance and Appropriations
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Tonisha Johnson
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Chairwoman Carruthers, ranking member Liston and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee, my name is Tonisha Johnson and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. An increase to the DD budget is something I believe is necessary for a number of reasons. I have worked at Brookside Extended Care for 6 years. In that time, I have been a DSP, Team Leader and now the facility's scheduler.

As a scheduler, I make sure there is enough staff coverage for every shift each day. The past 2 years have been physically, mentally and emotionally difficult, especially when there is not enough staff to make a schedule. It's not easy to do when everyone has already worked three 16 hour days in a row and you're asking them to come in and take care of 92 individuals that are fully dependent on you to take care of all their needs. The staff feels defeated before they even walk in the building knowing that they are going to have to work short again. It is very difficult to keep staff under these conditions.

At Brookside, so much is required to take care of our resident's needs; personal care, bathing, dressing and mealtime is just the starting point. I won't even go into all the specialized braces, splints and AFOs that our individuals are required to wear or how many times we are turning and repositioning to prevent bed sores and aspiration.

The job is incredibly demanding on a good day but is even harder when two people are doing what should be the job of 10. If you are lucky enough to have a dedicated and knowledgeable co-worker working beside you, it makes all the difference in the world. Unfortunately, it is more likely than not, that your partner is inexperienced and may just be there for a paycheck. I can't tell you how many times someone starts the job and does not even show up for their second day. We are not able to pay enough to compensate people for the amount of work that is expected.

Many times, I have been so tired and hopeless that I have wanted to stay home or give up entirely, but I can't. The individuals I care for mean a great deal to me so I continue to come back to work and have no days off just to help make sure they are taken care of.

Over the past year, we have been forced to use agency staff just to be able to provide for our residents basic needs. Having the extra staff may sound like a benefit but it comes with many challenges. We take for granted how important it is for staff to be familiar with the individuals

we serve. Our residents are non-verbal and don't have the ability to tell you what they want or how they feel so it makes it difficult for someone who does not know them to provide care. Most of our agency staff have only worked in nursing homes or assisted living so it is a difficult transition to working in a facility where everyone requires total care. Most agency staff have not worked with individuals with DD and/or with very young children which can be intimidating. There is a huge learning curve and most people aren't willing to put in the time or effort to learn. I can't tell you how many agency staff have turned around and walked out the door when told what they were expected to do.

As a scheduler, the staffing crisis has made it impossible to have consistency and stability. Every day I'm recreating the wheel, never knowing what to expect or plan for. We may have 6 people scheduled for orientation and only one shows up or an agency person is scheduled but they walk out. If we were talking about a restaurant, it would be easy to shut the doors and close for the day but when you are working with people with disabilities that is not an option.

The low pay on top of people having to work short staffed does not make the DSP job very appealing. It is hard to compete when fast food workers make the same if not more than DSPs for a lot less responsibility. I am please asking you to support an increase to the DD budget so that our field can finally stabilize and we can once again provide the care our residents deserve. Thank you for your time and consideration today.