

House Committee on Finance and Appropriations
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Annette Vonderhaar
Direct Support Professional – Brookside Extended Care
March 16, 2023

Chairwoman Carruthers, ranking member Liston and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee, my name is Annette Vonderhaar and I have been a Direct Support Professional, also known as DSP, at Brookside Extended Care for the past 32 years. I provide care to 92 children and adults with severe to profound disabilities. All of our individuals require total care.

DSPs are the heart and soul of the building as well as the eyes and ears of the people we care for. We don't stop caring even when we clock out and go home. The people we care for are like family and hold a special place in our hearts.

Just imagine what each of us had to do this morning to get ready for the day. We had to get out of bed, shower, dress, style our hair, have breakfast and brush our teeth. Now imagine doing this 20 times in one morning. That is the role of a DSP at Brookside. Our residents rely on us to complete that process for them.

Retaining staff is important for the people we care for. We build relationships with each and every individual by learning their likes and dislikes. What makes this especially difficult is that they are mostly non-verbal and can't tell us! We have to rely on their facial expressions, eye contact and body movements to figure out if they are happy, sad, feeling bad or just needing a friend.

DSPs have many different roles. We are often asked to go to doctor's appointments or accompany them to the hospital so that there is someone they know and trust in an unfamiliar environment.

Last year, having just driven 1600 miles and having one day left of vacation, I received a call from Brookside asking if I could work a 4 hour shift. This wasn't just any call; our facility literally had no staff to care for 92 residents. Everyone else had already worked 16 hours straight and there was no one left. I was literally going to be working side by side with our CEO, Regional Director and Administrator to make sure our residents' basic needs were met. I did not hesitate. I walked into the building and had residents so happy to see me. Giving me high fives, calling out my name and reaching out for hugs. It filled my heart with joy knowing I make a difference in their lives. I wish I could say this was the only time we have been in a staffing crisis.

I have worked in health care for 32 years and have seen many things change but one thing that continues to decline is the number of staff which results in a decline in the quality of care. I do believe if there was a wage increase for DSPs it would help bring a higher quality of workers into the field; people who are committed to taking care of the wants and needs of the individuals we serve.

I am able to retire in 4 years and I hope before I do that I am able to leave knowing that the people who I cared for so many years will be well taken care of and happy. I am asking you to please support an increase to the DD budget. Again, thank you for allowing me to testify today.