



**Council of the District of Columbia
Budget Oversight Hearing: Committee on Health
Department of Healthcare Finance
February 6, 2019
10:00AM -- Room 500**

Good morning to you and members of the Committee on Health. My name is Russ Snyder, and I am the CEO of Volunteers of America Chesapeake, a faith based human service provider operating in the District since 2008 providing supporting services to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as serving as a public behavioral health outpatient clinic. I am also the current president of the DC Coalition of Disability Service Providers.

I come before you today to testify in support the funding of 125% of the minimum/living wage for our direct support professionals.

Our 55 members are concerned about the shortage of DSP's that we are experiencing in supporting the over 2000 individuals in our care. The labor shortage can be tied to the compression of the minimum and living wages as Mr. Paregol testified to. The fact is that without wage incentives or a tiered approach, our workers are going to continue to seek other employment due to the very nature of our work. Taking care of our individuals is not easy work.

Our neighbors in the State of Maryland and in Montgomery County have recognized that a I/DD provider system must be funded above the baseline and both the State of Maryland and Montgomery County use a mechanism to achieve that goal. By approving legislation in 2017 that is specifically designed to provide additional funding support for I/DD systems at 125% of the effective local minimum wage, Montgomery County has specifically helped foster stability in the recruitment, retention and pay scales with the DSP workforce for the I/DD provider community. Both Maryland and Montgomery County policy makers understand the special role that our critical workforce plays in providing comprehensive community-based services for their most vulnerable citizens. This role is no different in the District of Columbia. Further, as of July 2018, neighboring Montgomery County providers now pay more for DSPs than the District which will further impact the ability of DC providers to recruit staff.

We have shared with Director Turnage and his team our funding model and tiered systems for funding of this initiative. We appreciate their responsiveness to our proposal and understanding of the need for a different wage system for DSP's. Our proposal is fairly straight forward and reduces the financial impact on the District while creating an incentive system for our providers.

The tiered funding system of the living wage would consist of an introductory rate hires at 110% of the living wage. For those with some human services support experience, we recommend a mid-range

factor of 115% of the living wage where the bulk of the workforce might be funded. For DSPs with greater experience, we would urge funding for a higher tier for the more experienced and top-tier DSP's who remain critical to quality supports at 125% of the living wage. In addition, stakeholder feedback found that a tiered system of funding (e.g. DSP 1, DSP 2 and DSP 3) which is pegged to seniority would be a more motivating for direct support staff.

In addition, we are recommending that the District adopt a similar accountability system as Montgomery County has adopted which is working well for the I/DD provider community and their agencies. The County requires all providers to document DSP wage documentation based upon the number of DSP work hours and the average annual wage expenses incurred by the provider. In the District, providers would be held accountable to spend the allocated DSP wage payment consistent with the expectations of DHCF and DDS for this tiered system.

In conclusion, the Coalition members are gravely concerned about the effects of wage compression on our ability to support the individuals in our care with quality services. We have very high DSP turnover and we are convinced that this tiered incentive based wage system will alleviate our concerns.

The DC Coalition urges the District to address this crisis immediately by tying DHCF and DDS funding of the DSP wage factor in the District's per diem rates to 125% of the Living Wage (a level well below those from just five years ago) so that DC does not repeat its troubled history with respect to I/DD supports and so that DSPs in this field can receive a proper wage in light of the extensive training required, the life-sustaining importance of the position, and the independent nature of the tasks required.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide testimony on this very important issue for our members. I am happy to answer and questions that you may have.

Respectfully submitted

Russell Snyder,
CEO, Volunteers of America Chesapeake