

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2017

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 AND HOME CARE WORKER WAGES

Introduced By: Senators DiPalma, DaPonte, McCaffrey, Conley, and Gallo

Date Introduced: March 02, 2017

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 service professionals (DSPs) and  
3 job coaches, are trained staff that are engaged in activities of daily living and  
4 community/employment support; these employees earn wages that place them and their families  
5 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, for a 30 percent increase in five years. During the  
13 corresponding period, direct support professionals (DSP) and personal care attendants (PCA)  
14 have seen their combined average wages move from \$10.65 to \$10.82, or increase by 1.6 percent  
15 over 5 years. Our neighboring states of Massachusetts and Connecticut saw increases in the  
16 minimum wage of 20 percent (to \$10 in 2016) and 16 percent (to \$9.60 in 2016) respectively.  
17 Over the same 5-year period, these 2 states increased their DSP/PCA wage by 7 percent (to  
18 \$13.02) and 8 percent (to \$12.19) respectively, compared with Rhode Island's \$10.82 per hour

1 wage. And, Massachusetts has committed to compensate their DPSs with a \$15.00/hour wage by  
2 2018; and

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

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

14 WHEREAS, In addition, as the state's Medicaid program seeks to assist more  
15 beneficiaries requiring long-term services and supports in home and community-based settings,  
16 the demand for home care workers has increased, and wages for these workers has not kept pace  
17 with neighboring states, leading to high turnover and vacancy rates in the state's home care  
18 industry; now, therefore be it

19 RESOLVED, That this General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence  
20 Plantations hereby respectfully urges the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental  
21 Disabilities and Hospitals to increase the base-payment rates for licensed developmental  
22 disability organizations, an amount to be determined by the appropriations process, for the  
23 purpose of raising wages for direct support professionals and job coaches that is implemented: (1)  
24 By October 1, 2017; and (2) In a manner that meets specifications related to implementation and  
25 reporting approved by the Director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental  
26 Disabilities and Hospitals and the Secretary of Health and Human Services; and be it further

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

34 RESOLVED, That this General Assembly hereby respectfully requests the Office of

1 Internal Audit within the Office of Management and Budget to conduct a vender compliance  
2 audit review after the implementation of the increase in base-rate payments in accordance with  
3 this resolution; and be it further

4         RESOLVED, That this General Assembly hereby respectfully requests the Executive  
5 Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to institute a one-time increase in the base-  
6 payment rates for home-care service providers to promote increased access to and an adequate  
7 supply of highly trained home health care professionals, in amount to be determined by the  
8 appropriations process, for the purpose of raising wages for personal care attendants and home  
9 health aides to be implemented by such providers: (1) By October 1, 2017; and (2) In a manner  
10 that meets specifications related to implementation and reporting approved by the secretary; and  
11 be it further

12         RESOLVED, That this General Assembly hereby further requests the EOHHS to  
13 implement said increase in the base-payment rates for home-care service providers in a manner  
14 that results in personal care attendants and home health aides earning a base wage of not less than  
15 \$15 per hour by fiscal year 2022. The rate shall be adjusted annually by a percentage increase  
16 equal to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) or a  
17 successor index as calculated for the northeast region by the US Department of Labor; and be it  
18 further

19         RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
20 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Governor of the State of Rhode Island, the  
21 Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, the Office of  
22 Internal Audit within the Office of Management and Budget, and the Executive Office of Health  
23 and Human Services.

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