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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2017

SENATE 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: Senator Louis P. DiPalma

Date Introduced: June 29, 2017

Referred To: Placed on the Senate Consent Calendar

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 Senate of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
20 hereby respectfully urges the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities
21 and Hospitals to increase the base-payment rates for licensed developmental disability
22 organizations, an amount to be determined by the appropriations process, for the purpose of
23 raising wages for direct support professionals and job coaches that is implemented: (1) By
24 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 Senate hereby further urges the Department of Behavioral
28 Healthcare, Development Disabilities and Hospitals to implement said increase in the base-
29 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 Senate hereby respectfully requests the Office of Internal Audit

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

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

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

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

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