

Dear Representative Prax,

My name is Shawn Lyle and I support HB 360. It is so important that caregivers have a voice in this process. Over 30 years ago, I started volunteering with the Special Olympics. I began my journey when a friend asked if I would be interested in working with her son who had autism. I decided to say yes, and for the next seventeen years, I worked with MSSCA (Mat Su Services for Children and Adults). I pursued this career because I felt it was a great opportunity to help make a difference for my client. I also have my own family and needed a job to support them. I was a caregiver and wanted to get involved with helping others to achieve all they could to be the best they could be. I was passionate about my service and worked in this capacity until an illness forced me to discontinue.

Over the years, I encountered many struggles as a caregiver. Raises were very infrequent, and the increase in pay was negligible. Overtime pay wasn't offered, so we were expected to volunteer our own time if the client's necessities took longer than expected. As staff, we struggled to pay our own basic bills, such as buying groceries, and we had no choice but to live paycheck to paycheck. The cost of living would go up, but our paychecks wouldn't reflect that increase. The need for more care givers is enormous. We have a large community of clients, and because of the pay and the hours, entire staff turnover happens frequently.

Since the Covid pandemic, I have been working with my adopted son. I am his in-home support staff. An example of my personal frustration with pay was when in the beginning, I had 32 hours. Of those 32, I could only cover 22. There have been weeks on my time sheet when I entered four hours of day habilitation and six hours of in-home care on the same day. When I received my paycheck, I was only compensated for eight hours of regular time, but the additional two hours of work were paid at half of the hourly rate. I had only 22 hours, and I had used ten hours. This disparity in pay happened more than once. In other instances, if I failed to include something on my time sheet, I would receive a call from the person over finances. No call was received over these discrepancies previously mentioned, so I reached out to clarify my confusion. The response was overtime pay is half of the hourly pay. I don't recall this ever being explained before, and no effort was made to notify me after the first time it occurred.

The most pressing and urgent changes that need to be made are: increased pay, more hours for both the clients and staff, improved sick leave and higher quality in support for clients when the care givers are using vacation leave. Addressing these issues would change not just the staff's lives for the better but the clients' as well. These changes would decrease the amount of stress experienced by the care givers, which would result in enhanced job performance and satisfaction, increased productivity and a decrease in employee burnout. An increase in pay would also benefit the businesses here in our own community by making it easier to recruit and retain workers. Satisfied employees would then reflect a healthy economy and a happy community. Providing clients with more money would also allow them to put those funds back into our community as well. I believe improving the working conditions of the staff would lead to a general progression of the clients' lives. We love our clients dearly and devote so much to them. This devotion and care need to be recognized and compensated fairly. I ask you to carefully consider my concerns and requests and act appropriately.

Sincerely,

Shawn Lyle