

**July 23, 2021**

**Attorney General Maura Healey  
Attorney General's Office  
One Ashburton Place  
Boston MA 02108**

**Re: critical staffing shortages hurt disabled adults on Cape Cod; need for increased pay for direct care workers**

Dear Attorney General Healey,

I am writing to ask for your support and advocacy on behalf of me and my colleagues: direct care workers in Massachusetts. I have the pleasure of being a direct care worker for disabled adults at Cape Abilities, Inc. on Cape Cod. I love my job and I love the people I care for on a daily basis.

However, this career is very challenging. It is hard work. It is stressful. And we are underpaid. These are some of the very reasons we consistently are understaffed. I, along with many co-workers, not only work full time during the day at Cape Abilities, but we also have second jobs. Some of us work at night in the residential houses through Cape Abilities, and others have wholly separate jobs (like I do). This is out of pure financial necessity.

The pandemic has made the direct care workforce even more limited. In fact, there have been clients who have wanted to return to their at day program, but the **lack of staffing prevents full reopening**. This is not unique to Cape Abilities. There is a huge challenge to fill open positions, and there is a lot of turnover because people burn out of energy in these jobs and because they financially can't survive on our wages.

I respectfully ask you to support legislation that would provide direct care workers with increased pay. Not only do we deserve higher wages, but this field is in desperate need of qualified and committed workers. One significant way to get these workers: increase the pay. In the end, it is the people we care for that will reap the greatest benefit by having fully staffed programs and workers who feel respected and adequately compensated.

Thank you for your time and understanding.

Sincerely,

Nisha Reilly  
Lead Day Habilitation Developmental Specialist  
Cape Abilities, Inc.  
Hyannis, MA 02061

September 15, 2021

Secretary Marylou Sudders  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
100 Hancock Street  
Quincy MA 02171

re: **Staff shortages, low pay impair profoundly affect our disabled adult son**

Dear Secretary Sudders,

I am writing to you as the proud mother of an adult son with special needs. My son, Ryan, is 34 years old and lives in a group home run by Cape Abilities, an agency on Cape Cod that provides residential and therapeutic services to adults with disabilities. Previous to the COVID pandemic, my son also attended Cape Abilities Day program in Hyannis. Ryan's group home is in Barnstable, MA.

Ryan is a happy, energetic and social man who requires 24-hour care to supervise his significant needs. We have been blessed with the opportunity to have Cape Abilities provide that care. **Since the pandemic began, Ryan has been unable to attend the day program that provided a routine and sense of purpose for him.** He has been out of program for more than **17 months**. He was able to socialize with his peers, work on his life skills and participate in community engagement that allowed him the opportunity to have a meaningful role in society. Now those things are beyond his grasp. Today, Ryan spends his days at his residential placement with limited opportunities to engage in social interaction and moderate exposure in his community.

Although the pandemic has been one of the causes of this shift in Ryan's quality of life, we had hoped as restrictions were lifted things would return to some sense of normalcy for our son. This has not been the case. **We are now facing a work force shortage that has been devastating to Cape Abilities and has had a profound effect on the services our son receives. Ryan is no longer able to attend the day program, due to staffing limitations, and we have seen staff shortages in his residence as well.**

The low wages that direct care staff receive for the work they do has made it extremely difficult for an agency like Cape Abilities to hire and retain staff. We have been blessed to have had caring, dedicated staff supporting Ryan in his time with this agency, but the work is challenging and the hours are long and demanding. Retention of staff is so difficult when the wages are minimal and our son has been challenged by the constant turnover in staff that he develops relationships with. Appropriate compensation for this profession is essential to the success of both the agency and the clients they serve. Cape Cod is also unique because of the challenges faced by the affordable housing crisis.

**I implore you to help us and facilitate immediate changes in legislation that will allow increased funding for Cape Abilities and enable this agency to provide their employees with an appropriate wage, so they may service and support clients like my son.**

Thank you,

Lauren and Tom Griffiths  
39 Brian Circle  
South Yarmouth MA 02664

**October 1, 2021**

**Dear Senator Cyr, Senator Moran, Representatives Peake, David Vieira, Steven Xiarhos, Kip Diggs, Timothy Whelan and Dylan Fernandes,**

Why should I work 3 jobs, 5-6 days a week to support the needs of disabled adults when I could work as a cashier for the same money? Or make better money as a Special Ed assistant at a public school in Hyannis or Dennis?

Why should I work with disabled adults with maladaptive behaviors (including kicking, biting, self-injury and physical aggression) and have responsibility for administering medication and implementing behavioral plans and Individual Service Plans when I could work at a less stressful and demanding job for the same or better money at Shaw's in Hyannis?

Why should I get home at bedtime to see my fiance, two children (ages 4 and 11) after working full-time at Cape Abilities, then providing individual supports to a disabled client who needs Hoyer lifts and medication then doing medication passes at a residential home 4 days a week? Why am I working nights and weekends yet still cannot make ends meet?

Why should I teach essential life skills to disabled adults and work a minimum of 14 hours overtime per week when my monthly rent of \$1,850 (without utilities) eats up half my income? Why does my income leave my family struggling from paycheck to paycheck?

Why should I give up time with my family, working – time I will never get back – at a job that does not pay a living wage? I cannot save enough money for Christmas presents for my children this year.

My name is Ashley Moniz and I am a lead developmental specialist at Cape Abilities in Hyannis. I am qualified as a certified nurse aide, patient care technician, and phlebotomy and EKG specialist. The cost of living in Cape Cod does not reflect the pay we receive, if i do not work overtime i CANNOT pay my rent let alone my other bills, no matter how much i work i still find myself scraping by from check to check our job is important and we need a livable wage we need time with our families and time for our own mental health and refresh our job is not easy but it is needed and without us many of our individuals would be in institutions and lack the socialization they receive here please take the time to consider the job we do and help us.

**Our consumers are the reason why I do what I do: I love my job more than I can say. I do important work that makes the lives of disabled adults safer, richer and meaningful. I make a difference in their lives. But I cannot continue this way without receiving a salary that reflects the professional skill, experience and training my work requires.**

Thank you for listening, and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ashley Moniz  
Centerville, MA  
(508-776-9182)

**To: Secretary Marylou Sudders, Exec. Office of Health and Human Services 10/7/21**

**RE: Why I quit my job as a direct care provider to disabled adults**

Dear Secretary Sudders,

My goal in life is to make the world a better place for children and adults with disabilities. I share that goal with thousands of direct care professionals in Massachusetts. I was proud to work at a community-based program but I resigned to take a position that provides me greater financial security and less stress.

Shortly after I graduated from Assumption College with a Bachelors degree in Human Service and Rehabilitation Studies. I accepted a position at Cape Abilities as a one-on-one aide. I was promoted to Developmental Specialist and then promoted again to Developmental Lead at Cape Abilities' Day Habilitation program in Hyannis. I made about \$17/hour. In addition, I worked overtime at one of the group homes for about 10 hours on weekends. Fortunately, because I was under 26, I was on my parents' health insurance so I did not have that expense. Nonetheless, it was difficult to make ends meet. I don't know how some of my co-workers survived on such poor wages. The work was very stressful because working with adults with disabilities requires expertise, the implementation of behavioral plans and constant supervision to prevent unsafe behaviors. The stress was exacerbated due to long workweeks and chronic short staffing.

I burned out after two years. I decided to leave. I accepted a position as a teaching assistant in a special education classroom at Monomoy Regional School District, where I work today. I have the summer off; I am paid about \$25,000/year plus benefits and receive tuition reimbursement. I am very close to receiving my Masters degree at Bridgewater State. Once I receive my degree, I will be eligible for a far greater salary and benefits. I hope to continue to work at Monomoy Regional School District supporting children and adolescents with disabilities.

I am committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities. I can do so at a public school and, at the same time, create financial independence for myself. Unfortunately, my former colleagues and friends at community-based programs are not paid the salary and benefits they truly need and deserve.

**Please increase salaries and benefits for direct care providers at community-based programs to ensure excellent care for people with disabilities.**

Very truly yours,

Allison Kilkenny  
Chatham MA

**October 8, 2021**  
**Senate President Karen Spilka**  
**State House**  
**Boston MA 02133**

Re: Mental health needs of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities; need to increase wages for direct care providers; HR 237

Dear President Spilka,

The mental health and behavioral health of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are imperiled due to historically high staffing shortages post-Covid. I write to urge you to support immediate wage and benefits increases to protect our most vulnerable citizens.

I am writing as a licensed Applied Behavior Analyst in support of funding to increase the salaries of direct care staff (human services workers) working in the residential, day habilitation, and supported employment programs serving individuals with IDD. I work with people with IDD at community-based organizations such as Cape Abilities.

My goal is to demonstrate how the mental health of people with IDD is declining and at further risk because many are not currently receiving services post-Covid. I also want to show the complexity and difficulty of the work human services workers perform in managing and treating maladaptive behaviors. These behaviors are often physically dangerous.

The work requires a high level of skill, extensive training and experience. The success of behavioral support plans depends on these professionals. Human services workers – regardless of whether they are employed by a community-based organization or a state-operated program – should be paid commensurate with those job requirements.

Human services workers are required to manage maladaptive and unsafe behaviors of people with IDD. “Unsafe behavior” is any behavior that places an individual and/or peers and staff in immediate danger of harm. **“Maladaptive behavior” includes self-injury, physical aggression, property destruction and oppositional behavior.** For example, we may have to manage and treat severe self-injurious behavior. We have had individuals who are blind due to detached retinas resulting from repeatedly banging their fists into their eyes. We have had individuals who engage in severe skin picking; sometimes this results in exposure of the bone. **Human services workers treat these severe unsafe and maladaptive behaviors on a daily basis. When people with IDD fail to receive the treatment they require due to staff shortages, their mental health suffers. They regress.**

We also work with individuals who engage in physical aggression, including biting, head butting, kicking, hitting, and spitting. The targets of physical aggression are often the staff but also include vulnerable peers. These behaviors occur on a daily basis. Direct care staffers are responsible for safely managing these behaviors while providing treatment in accordance with the positive behavioral support plan.

**Believe me, this is a tough job requiring a skill level that comes only from extensive training and experience as well as a dedication and passion for the job. Human services workers are indeed skilled professionals and they should be compensated as such.**

Community based human services organizations have been hit hard by Covid, especially here on Cape Cod. Staff vacancies are at record highs. The state reimbursement rates do not provide a living wage. The health and safety of disabled adults are in jeopardy. Passing H.237 and S.105 is one critical step to our ability to attract and retain valued staff, as well as to support individuals with IDD.

Thank you for your time and attention and please feel free to contact me for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Mark J. Hirsch, Ph.D. LABA  
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