

Media Contact:
Margaret Brennan
Margaret.Brennan@jtpr.com
312-573-5433 (W)
404-755-6677 (C)

Illinois Senate passes bill to give caregivers a living wage

SB955 would give \$15 an hour to those who care for people with disabilities

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – May 10, 2017 – The Illinois Senate on Wednesday passed SB955, a bill that would raise wages to \$15 an hour for caregivers of people with disabilities, end a staffing crisis at organizations across the state and safeguard the future of the state’s most vulnerable residents. After Wednesday’s action in the Senate, the bill will move to the House with a May 31 deadline for passage.

“We urgently ask the House and Gov. Bruce Rauner to make this essential bill a law,” said Kim Zoeller, president and CEO of Ray Graham Association, which serves adults and children with disabilities. “If we don’t pay caregivers a living wage, we’re turning our backs not only on them, but on thousands of people with disabilities and their family members who rely on this life-sustaining care.”

Across Illinois, hundreds of agencies that serve people with disabilities are facing an escalating crisis because wages paid to caregivers – known as direct support professionals (DSPs) – stalled nine years ago at \$9 an hour, one of the lowest rates paid by any state in the nation and one that puts many caregivers below the federal poverty line. Low wages have led to critically low levels of staffing that advocates say are endangering the safety of people with disabilities.

After the General Assembly last year passed a bill to raise wages to \$15 an hour, the governor vetoed it, arguing that caregiver wages should be addressed as part of a comprehensive state budget. However, Rauner’s FY18 budget introduced in February included no such increase.

As a consequence of the chronically low funding, a federal court monitor issued a report in January saying that Illinois is now violating a federal decree issued in 2011 after civil rights attorneys sued the state for failing to comply with a 1999 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. At a hearing on the matter last week, the state asked for more time in responding to the latest motion, but attorneys for people with disabilities replied that such delays were unacceptable and that the Illinois disability service system is now “on the brink of disaster.”

###