FACT SHEET

# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES **DESERVE MORE IN ILLINOIS**

Over the last decade, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have increasingly moved to community-based settings that provide daily life skills, support active engagement in the community, and foster an independent and safe environment.

**Direct support professionals (DSPs)** are the trained staff who provide that dedicated care and support. Unfortunately, DSPs earn woefully inadequate wages, which has caused a staffing crisis in Illinois as many of them leave for better paying jobs.

People with disabilities deserve the opportunity to lead a full, meaningful life. But they must have support for everything from eating, bathing and administering medication to job and life-skills training. **That support comes from DSPs whose starting wages, on average, are reimbursed by the state at just $12.38 an hour.** This acute staffing crisis has been compounded by the state's overall failure to adequately fund nonprofit provider agencies that serve people with disabilities.

As a result, people with disabilities and their families face constant change and uncertainty. And worse – it can be dangerous, even life-threatening, when there isn't enough staff. More and more providers are forced to shut down programs and turn people away who need and deserve support. The wait list for services is nearly 20,000 in Illinois. The state meets other obligations – funding jails, skilled nurses and schools. Illinois needs to make people with disabilities a priority.

They Deserve More, a coalition of nearly 90 agencies and organizations, was founded in 2017 to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Illinois get the services they deserve. After **nine years** without a DSP wage increase, three small raises were secured, resulting in the current $12.38 an hour reimbursement. Additionally, the 2019 state budget provided the first slight cost-of-doing-business increase in **11 years** for programs for people with disabilities. The Illinois Department of Human Services, pending federal approval, plans to increase the DSP reimbursement to $13 an hour this year – but that increase has not yet been implemented.

***Support SB 3269 and HB 5074 to increase state funding for people with disabilities by 20% — with 75% of this increase dedicated to DSP wage reimbursements.***

Upcoming minimum wage increases are great for Illinois workers, but they threaten to undo the progress we've made. When you can make $15 an hour at Amazon or $26.50 as a census worker, it's sadly an easy choice to leave. Caring, compassionate people who want to do this work simply cannot afford to. This problem is even more dire in Chicago, where the minimum wage will rise to $14 an hour in July. At the same time, the state has not fully taken into consideration the rise of inflation and cost of doing business.

The Governor has shown leadership by including a total DSP wage increase of $1.50 an hour in his proposed Fiscal Year 2021 budget. But DSPs would still be paid barely more than the Chicago minimum wage (for now) and less than competing jobs in sectors like retail and warehousing. Two bills introduced in the General Assembly – SB 3269 and HB 5074 – provide a comprehensive solution by raising DSP wages to a sustainable level and funding providers' crucial operations. It's time to solve this crisis. People with disabilities deserve more.

BY THE NUMBERS

# THE DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL (DSP) CRISIS

## People with disabilities are suffering

**53.7%**

Turnover rate of direct support professionals in Illinois — 2.4% higher than the National Core Indicators average of 51.3%.

**30%**

DSP vacancy rate at two of the largest provider agencies in Illinois.

**3.5%**

Cost of doing business adjustment provided in 2019, the first in 11 years, compared to a 20% increase in the rate of inflation in Illinois.

**19,436**

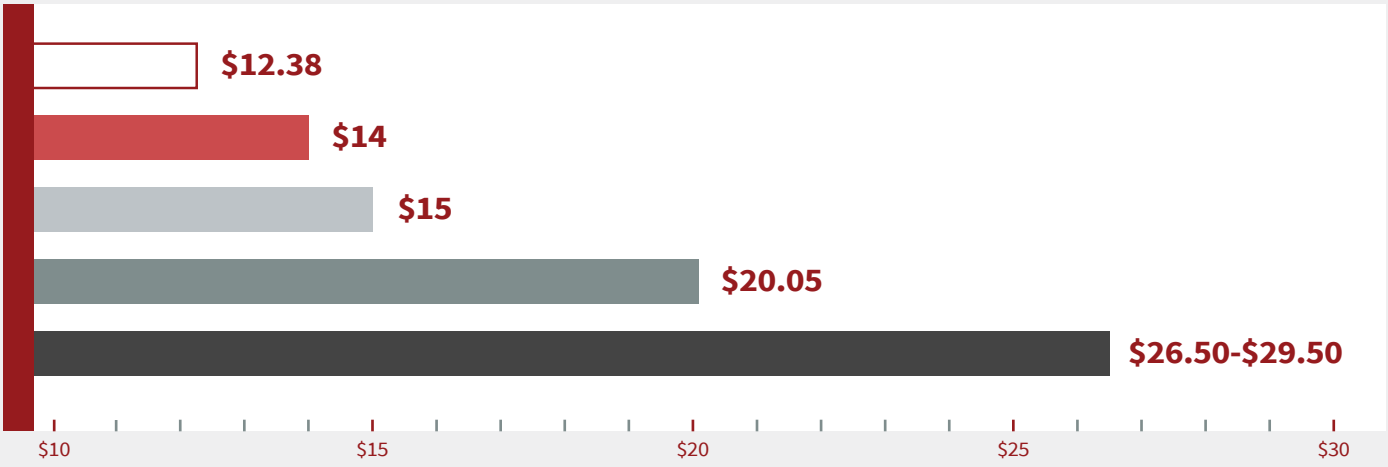
Illinois is one of just five states with a waiting list for home and community-based services that is greater than 15,000 individuals.

## Illinois is way behind

**Illinois' rank among states for spending commitment for people with disabilities.**

## DSP wages are not competitive and can't keep up with minimum wage

In the last 20 years, the state minimum wage has increased 80%, while **DSP wage reimbursement has increased only 25%.**




- Current state reimbursement for the average DSP wage
- Chicago minimum wage effective July 1, 2020
- Amazon warehouse minimum wage
- Part-time school bus driver advertised hourly wage
- Census worker hourly wage range in Cook County according to 2020census.gov