

# THEY DESERVE MORE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Thousands of Families, Community Agencies and Disability Rights Advocates  
Urge State Lawmakers to Stabilize Illinois' Community Support System**  
*They Deserve More Coalition seeks \$2/hour Direct Support Professional wage increase,  
fulfilling IDHS plan to resolve staffing crisis*

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), their families and community-based provider agencies are calling on the Illinois General Assembly to deliver sustainable wages for front-line support staff in the FY2026 budget. By implementing a \$2 per hour wage increase for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), the state can meet its obligation to people with disabilities and the workers who support them.

DSPs work in group homes and day services, providing support for everything from eating, bathing and administering medication to job and life-skills training and recreation. The state reimburses community agencies for DSP wages, but those reimbursements stagnated for nearly a decade through 2016, creating a staffing crisis with debilitating impacts throughout the statewide system.

The General Assembly has taken steps to increase DSP wages over the last several years, but the impact has been blunted by concurrent increases to the state minimum wage. A 2020 study commissioned by the Illinois Department of Human Services ([the "Guidehouse Rate Study"](#)) recommended DSP wages be at least 150% of minimum wage to adequately support the community system. In FY2020, the state reimbursement reached 140% of minimum wage, but it has since dropped to 137%.

Because there are no further minimum wage increases planned, state action on DSP wages now can make true progress alleviating the staffing crisis. **Passing a \$2 per hour DSP wage increase this year will set the state reimbursement at \$22.50 per hour, achieving the 150% Guidehouse recommendation.**

The *They Deserve More* Coalition today delivered [a letter to Governor Pritzker](#) asking that a DSP wage increase be included in his February 19 budget proposal.

Eight years of incremental state wage increases have started to produce some early results in provider agency staffing. However, this progress is fragile and uneven, as evidenced by more than 16,000 people who remain stuck on a state waitlist with no services. In addition to direct impacts on the community system, a lack of community options is undermining the state's efforts to move residents out of state-run institutions.

And, [a 2024 report](#) estimated that 24% of home-based, family caregivers in Illinois are age 60 or

older—about 50,000 people. Many aging caregivers report constant anxiety about who will support their loved ones with disabilities when they're gone.

“Thanks to the General Assembly’s commitment to improve DSP wages, providers are finally starting to turn the corner,” said Kim Zoeller, president and CEO of Ray Graham Association, which serves adults and children with disabilities. “We understand legislators are working in a strained and uncertain budgetary environment but now is not the time to take a year off. Disability advocates are urging the state to maintain wage progress in FY2026 to ensure long-term stability, so the IDD system doesn’t slide back into crisis.”

Under [a 2011 consent decree with the State of Illinois](#), people with IDD must be permitted to live in a community setting if they choose to do so. Community services provide people with IDD the opportunity to live in a home setting, with jobs, engagement and activities that they don’t have in a state-run institution. A federal court has repeatedly ruled Illinois out of compliance with the consent decree since 2017, largely due to inadequate DSP wages and the scarcity of services that resulted.

The latest data from “[The State of the States in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)” (FY2021, published in 2024) ranked Illinois 46th in the nation for fiscal effort on community services.

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### **About They Deserve More**

*They Deserve More is a statewide coalition of more than 90 community provider agencies, trade and advocacy organizations, and friends and family of people with disabilities. The coalition was founded in 2017 to ensure that Illinois meets its obligation to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. To learn more, visit [www.theydeservemore.com](http://www.theydeservemore.com).*