



# Help us Help Tennesseans

Fulfilling Tennessee's Commitment to People with Disabilities  
**2021 Campaign for \$15 Per Hour DSP Wage**

**VOTE YES - SB114/HB130.** Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities are at risk of long-term disruption in the delivery of critical, life sustaining supports because *essential, frontline* direct care workers are increasingly being lured away to higher-paying jobs. The competitive employment environment has depleted qualified applicants. Once the \$15 an hour rate is effectuated, annual increases in the hourly wages and benefits should also be increased by the larger of a) the increase given to teachers; b) the increase given to state employees; c) the increase in the medical cost of living.

- It is therefore crucial to find a longer-term solution to the direct support professional (DSP) hiring crisis through stable, adequate funding that helps secure a healthy, meaningful and fulfilled future for Tennesseans with disabilities. *Tennessee's DSPs have been putting their lives on the line during COVID for \$10 an hour – some have lost their lives while trying to keep those they support safe.*
- Providers seek a provider rate reimbursement formula that supports a \$15 an hour DSP wage, with an annual increase clause to maintain a viable wage. A nearly \$100 million fiscal note in state funding to reach \$15 is projected.
- The DIDD waivers do not support an adequate DSP salary in the rates and providers continue to have a difficult time hiring and retaining workers as more Tennessee companies raise their base salaries to \$15 an hour. The Tennessee Comptrollers *October 2019 DIDD Performance Report* acknowledges that providers face a crisis-level shortage of DSPs and the DIDD Deputy Commissioner of Program Operations stated that more money is needed to alleviate workforce concerns. **The \$15 wage is less than half of the average wage of a Tennessean.**
- Some legislators have asked providers to pursue a pay rate that would have a longer-term solution to the DSP crisis. Therefore this year we are seeking a rate formula that supports in today's dollars a DSP wage of \$15 an hour. **This rate is comparable to other positions that require the same, or even less, amount of specialized KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities) in the state of TN.**
- TNCO believes that DSPs need and deserve a minimum of \$15 per hour as competitive compensation for the high level of specialization and responsibility their positions require and their irreplaceable role in delivering continuity of care. **DSP/Client relationships, along with continuity of services by familiar DSPs, is essential to the well-being of the client.**
- TNCO research has validated that the rate increase to an average \$10 an hour wage had the effect of reducing turnover by approximately 10% across a statewide sample of 40 provider agencies. While this is a positive outcome, we cannot stop here. This is proof that any additional monetary increases per hour for DSPs will have a much needed and similar result of reducing staff turnover.

Today TNCO's members continue to experience exceptionally high turnover rates. This hiring and wage crisis results in an unstable workforce with serious potential long term consequences for the care of thousands of the state's most vulnerable citizens.

**Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO)** is a statewide association comprised of nearly 60 community agencies who provide an array of support services to about 10,000 Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. TNCO members employ nearly 20,000 Tennesseans across the state. These 20,000 Tennesseans include directors, managers, coordinators, nurses and DSPs. Many of TNCO's members were established in their local communities 30, to 40, to 50 years ago or longer.



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