



Tennessee Community
Organizations

40 Rutledge St.
Nashville TN, 37210

T 615.736.6090 or 877.265.2064

F 615.736.6095

W tnco.org

Melanie Keller, President

Robin Atwood, Executive Director

PLEASE SUPPORT turning \$11.7 million in nonrecurring state funds to RECURRING

In 2018, when the legislature appropriated the \$49 million in state funds and federal matching funds to increase DSP (*direct support professional*) wages to an average of \$10, Tennessee's Comptroller was also directed to conduct a survey of DIDD contracted, provider agency DSP wages to see how that money was used.

The Comptroller's report confirmed the appropriation was effectively used by providers to address the problem and also highlighted the challenging work still remaining. The report was provided to the General Assembly on Jan. 22. The report shows a consensus between DIDD and providers, stating: *"While low wages for direct support professionals is a nationwide problem, Tennessee ranked last among 20 states and the District of Columbia in a 2016 survey of average hourly wages for experienced DSPs and next to last for entry level DSPs..."*

Your help is needed to make the funds recurring per the community providers' agreement last year to use the money solely for DSP wages. It's essential to maintain DSP pay at \$10, or more. Due to low wages, job stress, and better pay they can make elsewhere, there's a crisis-level shortage of direct care workers across the state which makes retention essential to maintaining quality and continuity of care for the state's 10,000 citizens with disabilities.

Last year we talked about the competition we're getting from companies who can pay our workers better, but in just that 12 months time we've seen the trend toward \$15 an hour gain momentum and put more pressure on providers to be competitive. The DSP hiring crisis, fueled by low wages, is driving a decline in the number of qualified applicants to fill DSP positions. Providers continue seeing an increase in less qualified applicants whom often struggle to pass background checks and drug tests. Our DSPs can find jobs with less stress and responsibility for better pay and better benefits at nearly every major retailer and restaurant in our communities. Walmart recently announced it would be hiring new employees at a starting wage of \$11 an hour. The labor market is increasingly competitive. Tennessee community provider agencies cannot compete.

More on DSPs - DSPs support people with daily tasks such as food preparation, medication administration, employment skills training. They also provide support to some people who need even more extensive support like toileting or mobility assistance. DSPs must have nearly 60 hours of training and most receive medication administration training. It is expected in Tennessee that people who make on average \$10 an hour to not only be medication savvy, like LPNs, but to also know how to help people get jobs — jobs that in many instances pay more than what they themselves make as DSPs.

About Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO) - *TNCO is a statewide association comprised of more than 60 community organizations 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 direct support professionals. TNCO was established in 1977 and many of its members were established in their local communities 30, to 40, to 50 or more years ago.*