



January 11, 2019

Governor Gina Raimondo  
Senate President Dominick Ruggerio  
House Speaker Nicholas Mattiello  
State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Raimondo, Senate President Ruggerio, and House Speaker Mattiello:

The low hourly wages for Direct Service Providers (DSP) who provide services and care to close to 4,000 Rhode Islanders living with intellectual and developmental disabilities remains a critical issue. Past efforts to pay these caregivers a living wage have fallen woefully short. As Rhode Island begins the budget process, we urge you to pass a budget that provides a significant pay increase for DSPs this year.

The DSPs average hourly pay rate is between \$11.50 and \$12.50 per hour. Rhode Island should value their dedication and work by paying a living wage – many are the working poor. While recent budgets have included wage pass through increases, in 2018 there was no pay increase for this workforce. Rhode Island political leadership needs to demonstrate they value these service providers and the consumers they assist by funding a wage increase in this year's budget.

Without significant wage increases the crisis in staffing at community-based agencies will become more acute. The turnover rate among DSP's is 33% which is devastating for consumers and their families who rely on dependable, competent, and consistent care. In Massachusetts close to 35,000 Personal Care Aides are already earning a minimum of \$15 dollars per hour. Taking care of the IDD population is demanding both physically and emotionally. Our members are already witnessing their agencies' inability to attract and retain new DSP's.

We write on behalf of the direct care staff and nurses serving developmentally disabled consumers represented by the District 1199 NE SEIU, the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, the United Nurses and Allied Professionals, and the International Association of Machinists. Together our members along with consumers, families and other allies are demanding dignity to DSPs in 2019.

We supported last year's efforts to restore a proposed budget cut yet remain disappointed that simply treading water is not good enough. Vacancies go unfilled and quality of services suffer because funding

remains substandard. Rhode Island must make providing a significant pay increase for these employees a budget priority in 2019 to ensure the goal of increasing pay rates to a minimum of \$15 an hour by October 1, 2020 is reached.

There is significant community support for substantially raising the pay of these caregivers. In a poll done by Fleming and Associates in April, 2018, 84% of Rhode Islanders expressed support of a \$15 minimum wage for Direct Support Professionals

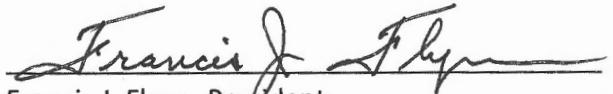
Prior to the landmark \$24 million cut to DD agencies in 2011, the State had established a benchmark pay rate of \$13.97 for Direct Support Professionals. Adjusted for inflation, that benchmark is currently over \$15/hour. The rate for 2012 was set at \$10.66 due to that devastating budget cut and is currently only at \$12.27.

It is hard to conceive how Rhode Island can comply with the 2014 US Department of Justice Consent Decree without paying an adequate wage to ensure appropriate staffing of programs.

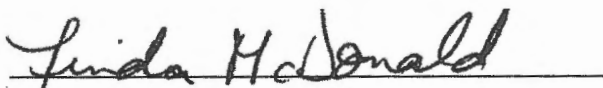
We urge you to propose and fund a budget that provides a substantial raise to DSPs this year and commit to establishing a minimum wage of \$15 per hour in the next two years.



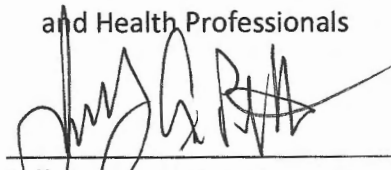
Patrick J. Quinn, Executive Vice President  
District 1199 SEIU New England



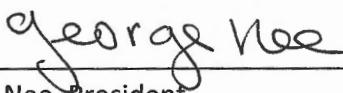
Francis J. Flynn, President  
Rhode Island Federation of Teachers  
and Health Professionals



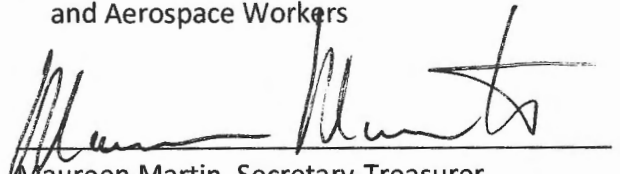
Linda McDonald, RN, President  
United Nurses and Allied Professionals



Jeffrey Perinetti, Assistant Directing Business Representative  
District 26 International Association of Machinists  
and Aerospace Workers



George Nee, President  
Rhode Island AFL-CIO



Maureen Martin, Secretary-Treasurer  
Rhode Island AFL-CIO

cc: Senate Majority Leader Michael McCaffrey  
Senate Minority Leader Dennis Algiere  
House Majority Leader K. Joseph Shekarchi  
House Minority Leader Blake Filippi