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PRESS RELEASE

Direct Service Professionals that serve individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities receive wage boost in state budget

Advocates from the Demanding Dignity campaign thank state leadership but say there is still much more work to be done

Providence, RI - On Friday, July 5, Governor Raimondo signed a budget that includes \$9.6 million in increased Medicaid funding to raise the pay for Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) that serve individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Demanding Dignity campaign, which launched to prioritize a \$15 minimum wage for Direct Service Professionals, feels the increased investment by state leaders is a good step toward improving the quality and consistency of care for this vulnerable population. The coalition, however, notes that even with this allocation, Rhode Island still lags behind Massachusetts and Connecticut – states that pay a comparable workforce significantly more.

Monica Scott, a direct service professional at Blackstone Valley ARC and member of SEIU 1199 New England, stated, “We shouldn't have to live in poverty to do this job. The funding increase we won is a big step forward in ensuring our clients get the care they need and our staff earns a little more, but we still have a lot of work to do to make sure that all Rhode Islanders with developmental disabilities – and those who care for them – can live with dignity.”

Diane Anderson, a Direct Service Professional at the Trudeau Center in Warwick and member of

the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, stated, "We would like to thank the General Assembly for recognizing the dire need for more funding for those of us that support folks with developmental disabilities."

"We're pleased that both the House and Senate were receptive to our coalition's efforts to secure a wage increase to the workers who serve this vulnerable population," said George Nee, President of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO. "We appreciate the Assembly adding \$3.2 million over the raise initially proposed by the governor to further increase wages. Any and all progress towards a \$15 minimum wage for these workers helps, but there is still plenty of work to do and we'll be back next year to push for further funding for individuals living with developmental disabilities and those who care for them."

Services and funding for programs that support individuals with developmental disabilities have been cut drastically over the years – and the U.S Department of Justice recently found that Rhode Island needs to improve these services. Program consolidations have led to individuals with different needs being grouped together, making it harder for consumers to receive the appropriate level of attention they deserve.

A 2019 public opinion poll conducted by Fleming and Associates found that 85% of Rhode Islanders support a \$15 minimum wage for Direct Service Professionals.

The Demanding Dignity campaign appreciates the efforts Senator Louis DiPalma and Representative Evan Shanley made during the legislative session to win progress for these vital services. Both Senator DiPalma and Representative Shanley introduced legislation to move Direct Service Professionals to a minimum starting rate of \$15 per hour. As configured, the budget increase will likely only move the average wage for DSPs to around \$13 per hour.

To learn more about this campaign, please visit www.DemandingDignity.com.