

May 4, 2020

Dear Michigan Legislators,

Our coalition is comprised of statewide organizations that have been advocating on behalf of direct support staff for several years. The purpose of this letter is to emphasize the critical and heroic nature of their work in providing supports and services to individuals with disabilities in the public mental health system.

The current pandemic has severely worsened the previous staffing crisis. Staff recruitment and retention challenges have increased dramatically.

Approximately 50,000 direct support staff provide essential services to vulnerable adults on a daily basis. The services include personal care, supervision and protection as well as assistance with a broad range of activities of daily living.

Direct support staff are true heroes during this unprecedented pandemic. They deserve to be recognized for their remarkable efforts.

It is the coalition's understanding that the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is funding a \$2.00 per hour staff wage increase for the months of April, May and June. Although we certainly appreciate this additional funding, it obviously will not have a sustainable impact on the staffing crisis. Some of our most vulnerable citizens are not receiving sufficient care during the pandemic. We urge you to find a way to make the wage increase permanent.

We understand that our state has a huge budget deficit for the current and next fiscal years. We ask for your support for additional funding for higher staff wages in future federal stimulus packages to Michigan.

In addition to the need for higher staff wages, it is critical that all of us continue to recognize the heroic efforts of direct support staff. Thank you for your concern and support.

