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Michigan policy leaders ignore needs of Direct Care Workers in early version of state’s FY 25 budget

[LANSING, MI] – Despite years of low wages and a shortage of support for Michigan’s Direct Care Workers (DCWs) and the people they serve, state lawmakers failed to address this critical wage issue in their initial version of Michigan’s FY 2025 budget. The oversight has prompted disability rights advocates to ramp up their grassroots advocacy efforts beginning this month.

A broad coalition of advocacy associations today asserts that immediate action is imperative to prevent further deterioration of Michigan's behavioral health system. DCWs are the backbone of the behavioral health system and deserve to be compensated at a wage that values their skilled work. The coalition backs a \$20/hour starting wage for DCWs statewide.

“More than 100,000 individuals and their families in Michigan depend on DCWs for daily assistance,” said Sherri Boyd, executive director of The Arc Michigan. “Despite their crucial role, however, DCW wages remain shockingly inadequate. There is no excuse for leaving our state’s most vulnerable residents in jeopardy—urgent action is needed.”

DCW wages are directly linked to Medicaid funding that has failed to keep pace with the state's needs. As a result, DCWs often receive paychecks that do not meet cost of living expenses. What’s more, they generally receive no medical or other benefits, prompting a significant exodus from the profession in favor of better-paying opportunities.

“This mass departure of DCWs has left tens of thousands of Michigan residents in precarious situations,” said Robert Stein, general counsel for the Michigan Assisted Living Association. “As a result, we’re seeing emergency care shortages, prolonged hospitalizations, reliance on aging parents for support, and the loss of cherished independence previously provided by DCWs.”

While the DCW wage coalition is quick to acknowledge the efforts of the Legislature over the past three years, the group contends that long-term, comprehensive strategies are urgently needed to support this essential workforce and the individuals they serve.

“Mere pay increases, while important, are insufficient to solve the systemic challenges facing DCWs, as evidenced by the staggering 38 percent turnover rate in the field,” said Todd Culver, president & CEO of Incompass Michigan. “We can—indeed, we must—do better.”

The coalition says it will be running an aggressive campaign to share pertinent information with state lawmakers in the weeks ahead.

To learn more and get involved in the fight for fair DCW compensation, please visit DCWMichigan.org.

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