

May
24

DCW COALITION TOOLKIT



Where we are

The FY 2025 budget cycle is just beginning here in the state of Michigan. Unfortunately, the Legislature has failed to include any funding for DCWs—not even the \$.85 increase from last year.

We need to send a strong message to the Legislature. **Now.**



What's next for us

The DCW Wage Coalition has updated its policy recommendations for the new year. We're broadening our advocacy to ensure all DCWs—in each and every community across Michigan—can stay on the job.

Our updated “ask” is included on the following pages.

OUR POSITION STATEMENT

A person with mental illness or a developmental disability deserves high-quality life experiences, filled with as much freedom and autonomy as possible. But here in Michigan, that's becoming an unattainable dream.

Why? Because our state's policy framework prevents it.

More than 100,000 individuals and their families rely on Direct Care Workers (DCWs) for their daily support and independence.

Unfortunately, DCW wages in Michigan's mental health system are directly tied to Medicaid funding, which has not kept pace with the needs of our state. **As a result, Michigan DCWs bring home very small paychecks, and often have no medical or other benefits.**

Consequently, thousands of DCWs are making a natural decision to leave the profession for jobs that allow them to better support themselves and their families.

For those who remain on the job, a growing number of administrative headaches and reporting requirements are adding complexity to DCWs' daily responsibilities. With more and more DCWs fleeing the profession, these changes translate into a growing amount of work—and a level of compensation that seems to mean less every day.

This leaves tens of thousands of Michigan residents facing:

- Emergency situations in which care is not available,
- Chronic or extended hospitalizations (we're talking months, not weeks),
- Reliance on aging parents for ongoing care and, most important of all,
- A loss of the independence they enjoyed when DCWs were available.

The natural outcome of these changes? The continued collapse of Michigan's behavioral health system, and a worsening state of emergency for families.

Salaries across Michigan are going up for everyone except DCWs. While previous increases helped, the reality is most DCWs earn on average a starting wage of about \$16 per hour. **This level of compensation is just too low to keep DCWs on the job, leading to a 42 percent turnover rate in the field.** It is absolutely essential for Michigan to ensure a \$20/hour starting wage for the state's 50,000 DCWs in the behavioral health system in the Fiscal Year 2025 state budget. This would require a total general fund budget expenditure of \$200 million.

During the past three years, the Legislature has been working to increase DCW compensation, and we are grateful for its efforts. However, long-term, statewide strategies to support DCWs who provide high-quality, person-centered support are yet overdue. To best support this essential workforce and the individuals and families that rely on it, we know robust, holistic strategies will be required.

In the past, we've asked for DCW pay increases to ensure safety and independence for the people they serve. But while that is an essential part of the equation, it's not going to solve the entire problem.

Here's what's next.



Partner with Local Economic and Workforce Agencies

Build better routes to DCW jobs and use data about the availability of local DCWs as a selling point for communities looking to attract new jobs and employers. By showing that it's possible for people with disabilities to live a full life in Michigan, we can make our state stronger and make economic development a priority.

- Build linkages with Michigan Works! agencies statewide as part of an effort to elevate the DCW profession.
- Seek opportunities to collaborate with economic and business attraction efforts.



Boost DCW Compensation

It is absolutely essential for Michigan to ensure a \$20/hour starting wage for the state's 50,000 DCWs in the behavioral health system in the Fiscal Year 2025 state budget. This would require a total general fund budget expenditure of \$200 million.

- Direct supervisors also must receive wage increases that are commensurate to the compensation of the individuals that report to them.
- DCWs should receive health care benefits and paid time off, as well as a supportive work environment.
- Annual cost-of-living increases are required to stabilize the DCW job sector.
- Consider alternatives to the "pass-through" model; funds should be allocated to the behavioral health system that are then built into equitable and sustainable reimbursement rates, allowing for higher wages for direct care workers.



Simplify Administration

Streamline and standardize reporting and documentation requirements. This outcome will help the remaining pool of available DCWs to provide supports more effectively, including higher levels of service, rather than unnecessarily spending time on paperwork.



Elevate the DCW Profession

Work to boost opportunity and growth within the DCW profession by investing in other critical aspects of the field, including:

- Accessible, competency-based training
- Tiered certification promoting a career pathway
- Consistent, portable, recognized credentials
- Professional associations
- Ethical standards
- Research and innovation
- Mentorship and leadership development
- Advocacy and public awareness
- Recognition and awards
- Stakeholder collaboration
- Diversity and inclusion
- Continuous improvement





Sharing our agenda

BUILDING DEMAND

Policy changes take time.

State leaders need to be convinced their constituents will support the new policy. The benefits of voting “yes” on a bill must be immense, as do the adverse consequences of voting “no.”

Our advocacy work in boosting DCW wages has been solid, but those returns are diminishing. The general fund budget is getting tighter, meaning that fewer dollars will be available to support future growth.

That is why our advocacy efforts need to broaden, deepen, and change in far more aggressive ways. This toolkit gives you the assets you need to make your voice heard on various levels and will be updated monthly to ensure you have the resources you need to be effective.

So please use it, share it, and help us keep the pressure on our state leaders to help allocate sufficient resources to our essential DCWs.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone's screen displays four colorful speech bubble icons: a blue one with a thumbs-up, a pink one with a heart, a red one with a play button, and a yellow one with an envelope. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with green foliage. A large, diagonal, teal-colored graphic overlay covers the right side of the image, containing the title text.

SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS & ASSETS

SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

- **Be purposeful in your posting.**

Social media is designed to engage people in conversation. Before you post, ask yourself whether the information you're sharing helps you advance the conversation in a way that makes sense and supports your objectives.

- **Use visual content.**

Images, GIFs and videos are more likely to get noticed and shared. You have a strong story to tell, so be sure to use videos, photos, and other visual assets.

- **Tagging lawmakers boosts visibility.**

Adding a social media tag will help draw notice from specific policy leaders and can increase views. **Click [HERE](#) to get lawmaker handles!**

- **Use the #MILEG hashtag to keep at the forefront.**

- **Stay positive and constructive.**

Whether posting or commenting, be sure to think carefully about what you're saying. Be polite and professional in your words, exercise clear judgment, and don't let social media trolling get you down.

- **Amplify, amplify, amplify!**

Look for content from like-minded organizations and individuals, and retweet/repost it with your own thoughts.



SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

Most Important Policy Leaders to Tag:

Sen.	Winnie	Brinks	https://www.facebook.com/SenatorBrinks	https://twitter.com/WinnieBrinks	https://www.instagram.com/brinkswinnie/
Sen.	Sarah	Anthony	https://www.facebook.com/SenSarahAnthony	https://twitter.com/SarahAnthony517	https://www.instagram.com/sarahanthony517/
Rep.	Joe	Tate	https://www.facebook.com/SpeakerJoeTate	https://twitter.com/SpeakerJoeTate	
Gov.	Gretchen	Whitmer	https://www.facebook.com/GretchenWhitmer	https://twitter.com/GovWhitmer	https://www.instagram.com/gewhitmer/

Website for Directing Traffic:

www.DCWMichigan.org

POST CLIPS TO SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Interview the DCWs you know, as well as family members and friends.**

Capture short video clips telling you, in their own words, what DCW support means in their lives. Make it short, compelling, and to the point.

- **Post and tag a lawmaker or two.**

When you do, you'll help share the story of DCWs and their needs and help ensure strong funding for the future.

- **Repeat!**

Consider repeating the process every week or so. It will help increase awareness of the need for increased DCW funding.



TIPS FOR POSTING A “SELFIE” VIDEO

- **Choose the right background.**

Make sure it's simple, clean and free of objects and images that you don't wish the entire world to see.

- **Check your lighting.**

Make sure your face isn't in shadow, or that you have a bright light/window behind you. Nothing is worse than watching a dark silhouette!

- **Record horizontally.**

This helps with video quality and sharing.

- **Make sure your voice can be heard.**

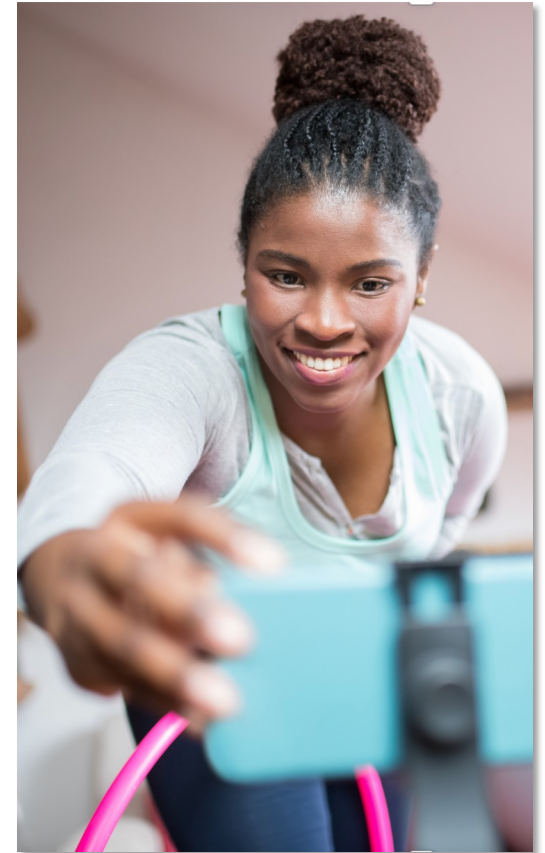
Look out for noise pollution (crying babies, barking dogs) and do a quick sound check to make sure you're not muffled or echoing.

- **Choose your words.**

Think about what you'll say before you press the red button. Use the DCW talking points as a foundation for your comments. Practice once or twice. Then go!

- **Keep it short.**

The average social media scroller will only pause for about 15-30 seconds (at the most) to listen to your video. Keep your message tight!



READY-MADE SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES

Click the link below to access and customize!



Show your support for Michigan's Direct Care Workers! We've prepared a few ready-made posts for you to easily share on your own social networks.

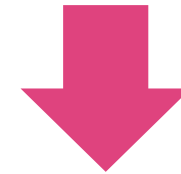
What social platform would you like to use?

X / Twitter


LinkedIn

Facebook

Instagram



<https://bit.ly/DCWMay24>



POLICYMAKER OUTREACH

TIPS FOR CONTACTING YOUR LAWMAKERS

- **Be clear.**

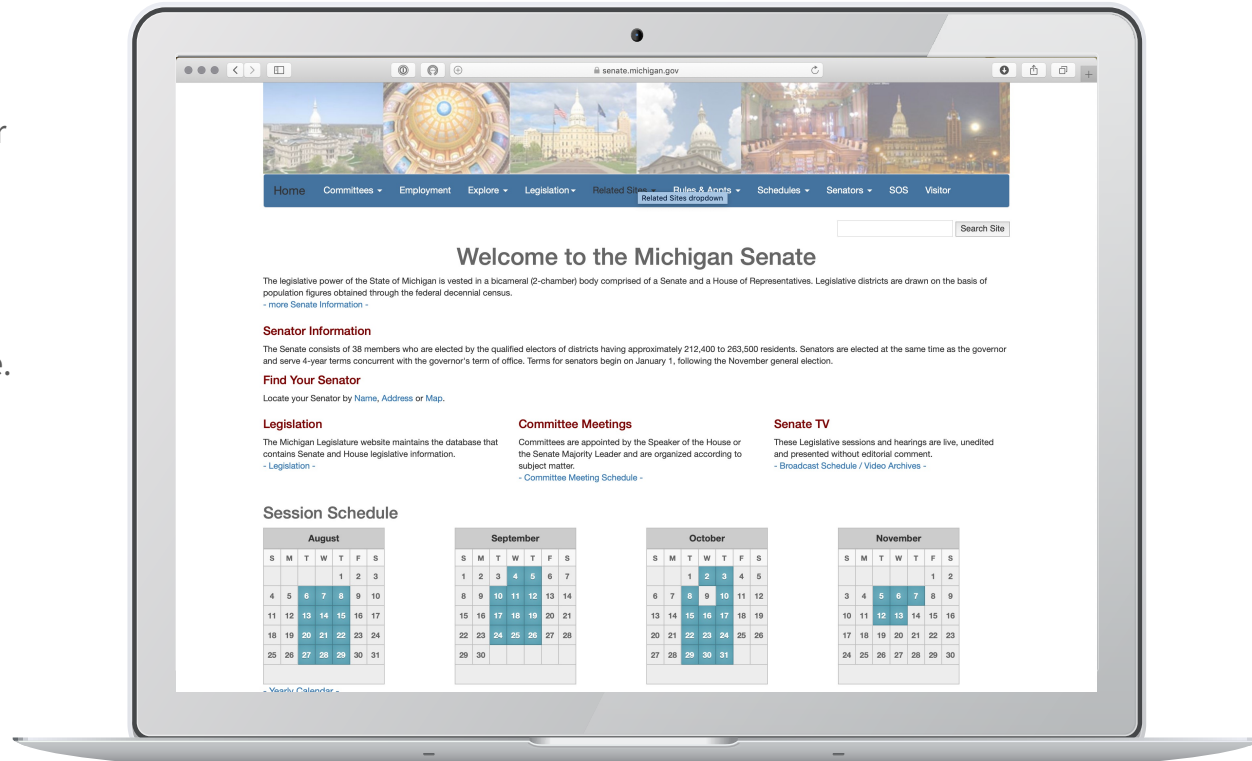
Use your time wisely and plan out your remarks. Busy policymakers appreciate it when you get to the point quickly and ask for clear action. Always be honest and direct without sacrificing courtesy.

- **Communicate multiple ways.**

Sometimes a personal meeting isn't possible. Use email, written correspondence, telephone and in-district coffee hours to reach your lawmaker and share your views.

- **Follow up.**

If you can obtain a personal meeting with a lawmaker, be sure to send a personal thank you note. It'll give you a chance to restate your arguments and show you care.



OTHER GRASSROOTS APPROACHES

- **Attend coffees and/or office hours.**

Many legislators set up local coffee hours where they can meet with members of the public. Make it a point to be present—and bring your student, if possible! These visits are highly impactful.

- **Reach out to policymakers when appropriate.**

If you hear your issue is up for a vote, make a call or shoot an email to the lawmaker's office. They need to hear from you before they push their buttons to vote!



SAMPLE GENERIC LETTER TO POLICYMAKERS

Dear Senator/Representative XX,

Across Michigan, families are in crisis. Our state's Direct Care Workers (DCWs) and the people they serve are suffering, and there's no solution in sight.

Currently, DCWs are funded through state Medicaid wages, which are set each year by you and your colleagues in the Legislature during the annual budget process. There are no other funding sources available to help keep DCWs on the job.

The wages you have set result in an average starting DCW wage of less than \$16 per hour. In a world where inflation is rising and job markets are growing, it's impossible to expect DCWs to remain in a low-paying job that is both physically and emotionally demanding. And as they move on, they leave vulnerable people without the care they need to undertake their daily lives and activities.

Currently, our state's mental health support system is built on the idea that DCWs always will be available. When they are not, people are forced to give up their independence. Families struggle, as someone must leave a job to stay home. And employers lose access to the talented individuals who keep our state's economy strong.

I urge you and your colleagues to advocate for the most vulnerable. Increase funding for Michigan DCWs to help keep them on the job. Please help keep our people and families safe.

All it takes is your vote for a \$4 hourly increase to DCWs during the FY 2025 budget cycle. It is not too much to expect a \$20 wage for people who are serving and protecting a population that faces extraordinary obstacles to daily life.

We are counting on you. Please help.

/s/



A close-up photograph of a stack of newspapers and several pens. The newspapers are slightly out of focus, showing headlines in Italian such as "IL RETRO", "Il primo passo", "le. Berlusconi", "Il Cavaliere", "Soc", "enda", and "ità". Several pens are visible, including a prominent one with a colorful, abstract design in pink, blue, and orange. A solid teal-colored triangular overlay covers the right side of the image, containing the title text.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TIPS FOR WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- **Get right to the point!**

LTEs are usually short. Make your strongest arguments early in the letter and take a firm position. The best letters have a short, crisp introduction, make just 1–3 points (supported with data), then offer a concise conclusion.

- **Make each letter your own**

While sample content is sometimes provided (see next), it's never wise to use it as is. Research the issues yourself and use your own distinctive voice to state your opinion.

- **Don't send the same letter to multiple media outlets.**

Publications prefer original content.

- **Be sure to include your contact info.**

The media outlet will likely reach out to be sure you are a real person.



SAMPLE GENERIC LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to urge our community to rally behind an essential cause that often goes unnoticed: the need for higher wages for Direct Care Workers (DCWs) in Michigan. As a crucial backbone of our behavioral health system, DCWs provide vital care and support to tens of thousands of families statewide. Yet, they often struggle to make ends meet due to unreasonably low wages.

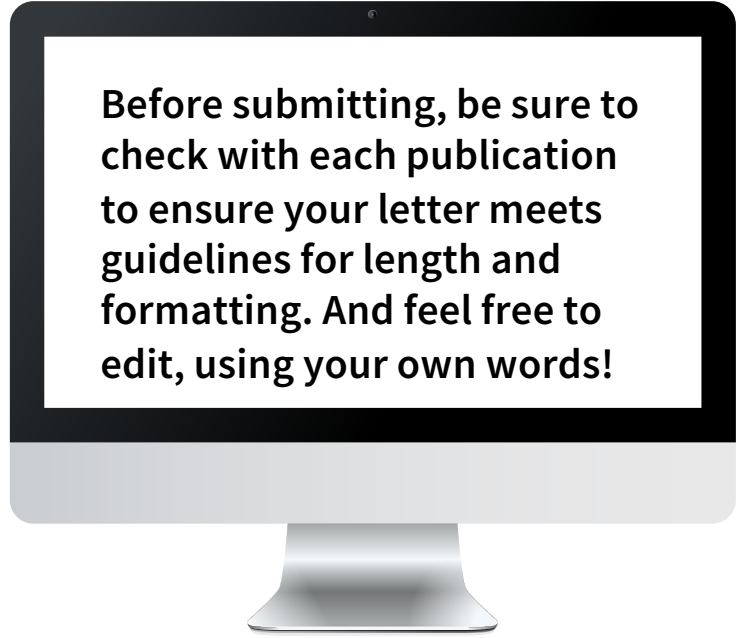
DCWs are the compassionate faces who ensure that our loved ones receive the assistance they need with daily tasks, medication management, mobility support, and emotional companionship. They work tirelessly, often in challenging conditions, to maintain the dignity and quality of life for those they care for. However, despite the immense importance of their work, many DCWs in Michigan are paid wages that fall far short of what they deserve.

The current situation is not sustainable. Low wages make it difficult for DCWs to support themselves and their families and contribute to high turnover rates in the field. This turnover not only disrupts the continuity of care for vulnerable individuals but also places additional strain on healthcare resources as people struggle to recruit and train new staff.

Investing in higher wages for DCWs is not only a matter of fairness but also a wise investment in the overall health and well-being of our communities. By adequately compensating DCWs for their hard work and dedication, we can ensure greater stability in the workforce, improve the quality of care provided to those in need, and enhance the overall efficiency of our healthcare system.

It's time for Michigan to step up and prioritize the well-being of Direct Care Workers. I urge our policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders to support initiatives that advocate for fair and livable wages for DCWs. Let's recognize the invaluable contributions of these dedicated individuals and ensure that they are compensated fairly for the essential services they provide.

/s/



Before submitting, be sure to check with each publication to ensure your letter meets guidelines for length and formatting. And feel free to edit, using your own words!

A photograph of a business meeting. In the foreground, two people are shaking hands over a wooden table. One person is wearing a white shirt and a brown jacket, while the other is wearing a dark suit. In the background, another person in a dark suit is sitting at the table with their hands clasped. A laptop is open on the table to the left, and a document with a blue chart is on the table to the right. A large blue diagonal overlay covers the top right portion of the image, containing the text 'RECRUITING MORE ISSUE SUPPORTERS' in white.

RECRUITING MORE ISSUE SUPPORTERS



HELP US GROW.

- Tell your friends, family and colleagues you support increased compensation for Michigan DCWs.
- Encourage folks to reach out to their policymakers and partner with each other.
- Share information with your employers, community leaders, and volunteer organizations.

For more information, contact
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