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Thank you to the Chairs and the members of the Human Services Committee for allowing me to testify. My name is Audrey Patterson. I'm here today in support of House Bill 6947 because I believe the state needs to increase the amount of funding to our agencies. However, we need to be sure that we are reimbursing providers with enough funding to cover the true cost of providing care, not just reimbursing at a uniform rate.

I am a direct care worker at two not-for-profit DDS funded private sector agencies. I care for some of our state's most vulnerable citizens. My co-workers and I have not had a cost of living rate increase in over seven years and have had cuts to our benefits in order to keep our jobs.

In order to provide for our families most of us have had to work two jobs. Even with two full time jobs most families are still struggling to make ends meet. We have seen how cuts to funding have effected the people we care for in high staff turnover, direct care hours being cut and choices of daily living hindered.

One of the agencies I work for has shared with us that due to economic difficulties they are seeking to merge with another agency. The agency that may take us over is proposing cuts to our rates of pay and benefits. I have provided care to the people of our community for over 25 years. Still, I am faced with a number of uncertainties when it comes to providing for me and my family as a result of inadequate funding to provide these services.

We appreciate the intent of the proposed bill but need you to provide reimbursement at an adequate level that reflects the true cost of providing these services. I am asking you to support a bill that will reimburse agencies with a minimum enough funding to provide a starting rate of pay of \$15 an hour for all direct care workers. Additionally, a 4.5% cost of living increase this year, and next year.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today and understanding the importance of the work we do and the value it has on our communities as a whole.