March 1, 2019
Lebert Lewin
Direct Service Provider, HARC
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Lebert Lewin. I am testifying today to urge the committee to support funding for all DDS services. This budget needs to recognize the needs of people with disabilities and the workers who provide their care in the public and the private sector.

I have been a worker at HARC for 14 years, where we provide invaluable care to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The people we take care of become like family to us, and I do everything I can to give them the best quality of life. However, due to constant underfunding, vital programs at my place of work have already been reduced. I used to be able to pick up extra hours doing recreation and respite work, to keep our individuals healthy and engaged, but cuts to these services mean the clients are missing out on some of their favorite activities. We shouldn’t be cutting vital services.

HARC also has very high turnover rates, which disrupts clients’ lives. After 14 years, I have just received a raise from $12.26 to $14.75. That is a major step forward, but wages are still very low, and many people cannot afford to stay in this industry and make a career out of direct care. This means that our clients suffer because we don’t have enough workers with the ability to provide them with the services they need. I can’t give the attention that our clients deserve when there are so few of us around to work.

The obvious solution is to improve funding for all DDS services. I urge you to work with us going forward to find a way to expand our services and improve our staffing so we can provide the best care possible to people with disabilities in our state.

Thank you for your time.