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Opinion

Guest Opinion: Murphy has forgotten direct support professionals

By Kevin Nunez

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I applaud Gov. Phil Murphy's agenda to make New Jersey "stronger and fairer," but I am wondering when I am going to be a greater priority on his list.

I am an active disability advocate living with cerebral palsy who has pushed hard to secure funding to raise the wages of direct support professionals (DSP). While Murphy maintained funding in fiscal year 2021 to increase DSP wages, the investment of new funding that's desperately needed to stabilize the DSP workforce does not appear to be at the top of his agenda.

Put in the simplest terms, DSP wages are not competitive. DSPs can make more working at many retailers or fast food restaurants at jobs that require far less responsibility. If the people who support us cannot thrive, we cannot, either. This needs to change.

Far too many direct support professionals are leaving the field because they simply cannot afford to stay. They are leaving a job that is fulfilling and full of joy to save on dollars for gas. This is leaving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities without the supports they need to live safe, productive lives in community settings.

DSPs are my lifeline. I literally could not get out of bed without them. Their support enables me to connect with my community, contribute and make a difference. A "stronger and fairer" New Jersey is one where everyone is able to realize their potential, and for many this is reliant upon the support of DSPs.

Gov. Murphy, please include me and the 30,000 residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities who rely on direct support professionals in your vision for New Jersey.

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