



501(C)(3) NON-PROFIT

# Alpha Opportunities, Inc.

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Chairman Senator Dever and Members of the Senate Appropriations Human Service Division,

My name is Mallory Everson and I am the Director of Operations and Quality Assurance at Alpha Opportunities Inc. in Jamestown ND. Alpha Opportunities Inc. has 3 licensed group home facilities, a day services program along with supporting people who live in the community. Currently, we support 58 people with various services. Just like all the other agencies across the state we struggle with staffing shortages, wages, turnover and the ability to accept new people supported into our services. Every week our team gathers to review the referral list and every week we must continue to deny services to people supported due to a lack of staff. We currently have openings in both of our ICF homes, our day services and residential habilitation services. We fight to compete with several other agencies in the small community of Jamestown for the limited amount of applicants that are out there. This combined with the competitive job market where we see starting wages at our local Domino's is \$18 per hour, compared to our current starting wage for a DSP is \$16 dollars per hour creates difficulties in hiring and retaining qualified staff.

A DSP wears multiple hats every day. They are a care giver, personal shopper, cook, taxi driver, medication aid, data collector, teacher, counselor, and most times a family member. All of this for \$16. There is a reason that applicants are going to Dominos and Walmart for \$18 an hour and not walking through the doors of Alpha Opportunities Inc. I have been in the DD field for 16 years and have held many different positions and I have never seen a staffing crisis such as this. We are not only struggling to fill DSP positions but also management positions such as supervisors, program coordinators and agency trainers. The turnover rate in the state of ND is 47%. Turnover had a very negative effect on our people supported. To start by having a stranger come into your home and provide very private supports to you, just as you start to feel comfortable they leave. The people we support must start this process all over again. Take a second to visualize a day in their shoes. Why are staff leaving? Each day as a DSP can be very emotionally draining, I know because I once was one. There were many times I thought about leaving for another job because being mentally exhausted is more hard on a person then physical exhaustion. When you see the ad for the local store offering you \$2 more an hour to stock shelves after a taxing day as a DSP, and your bills are sitting on your counter to be paid, unfortunately that is why they leave.

Weekly our agency evaluates our shortages and continues to try and entice the staff we do have to take on more and more shifts. We are working so hard on maintaining in hopes to not have to complete discharges. There is not an organization out there that wants to cut people out of their program because they unfortunately cannot staff them but it is getting closer to that decision more and more. Currently there are over 1000 people needing services across the state and if we cannot combat the staffing shortages in this industry unfortunately that number will increase. Alpha Opportunities Inc. strives to empower lives through advocacy, opportunities, and independence. We are unable to do this for people if we are having to discharge and shut down parts of our agency.

I strongly encourage you to please support the 6% and 4% inflationary increase for DD providers. The ability to increase wages provides us with a better opportunity to compete for staff in our community and in turn begin accepting people supported into services. Alpha Opportunities Inc. wants the ability to continue to provide for the community of Jamestown and families across the state that don't have another place to turn to.

Thank you for your time,

Mallory Everson

Director of Operations and Quality Assurance