

I'm Kathy Taylor and I am the lead staff in a group home for people with developmental disabilities. The company I work for provides Home and Community Based Services and is funded by a Medicaid waiver. The Medicaid waiver enables persons with mental retardation to live full lives as part of the community, rather than in an institution. It not only provides a better quality of life for people who require supports, it does so at a much cheaper cost per person.

However, it is hard to find quality staff people who will work at the rates paid under the program. The starting wage for direct care staff is just over \$7.00/hour. At the state-run institution across town, wages start at a little over \$10.00/hour for workers with the same qualifications. Four people with mental retardation live in the house I work in. There is only one staff member in the home at a time to change adult diapers, assist with toileting (and clean up accidents) cook dinner for 5 people, feed people who need assistance (and again clean up accidents), assist with training, assure all medications are taken appropriately, encourage everyone to perform daily hygiene tasks, prevent conflicts between residents and deal with problem behaviors. While all these daily tasks are occurring, teaching and encouragement are also provided to help the people I serve learn to be the best they can be.

Please don't cut Medicaid funding, so that I can continue to serve the people I serve. The HCS program changes lives and enables people with disabilities to be integrated into the community instead of living their lives in institutional drudgery. These community-based services are much more cost efficient than state-run institutions and would continue to operate more cheaply even if wages were increased for direct care workers. I love the people I work with and will continue to work in their home even though I have to work two jobs to make ends meet. Instead of Medicaid cuts, please consider the lives you can improve by providing competitive wages to attract quality staff people to this difficult but rewarding career.