

Good afternoon members of the appropriations committee. My name is Dawn Frey. I am the Executive Director for Sunrise Northeast Inc. We provide support for 115 people with developmental and intellectual disabilities throughout the State. Our mission is to create valued lives for people with disabilities.

I want to thank you for the opportunity today to testify on the HB 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup> 2023 and specifically how it will affect employee's and persons served by Sunrise Northeast.

The non profit community has endured budget cuts and chronic underfunding for many years which presents challenges in the agency's ability to continue providing quality care and has hindered the agency's ability to offer affordable healthcare for our valued employees. Direct Support Professionals provide hands on care while supporting choices and opportunities for independence to our states most vulnerable population. Sunrise Northeast's dedicated employees have come to work, day in and day out and have provided exceptional care in a variety of settings throughout the pandemic. At times putting themselves in situations that could lead to requiring medical care that they themselves cannot obtain due to the lack of affordable healthcare coverage.

Sunrise Northeast Inc. currently has 281 employees. Thirteen of which utilize the agency's healthcare plans. None of the 13 are DSPs.

Preventative care is not an option for those without affordable healthcare which leads to an increase in illnesses. When illness prevents an employee from working it disrupts the continuity of care for persons served and puts a strain on the remaining workforce. This strain has resulted in an increase in turnover rates and the agency has struggled with hiring qualified, caring employees during the pandemic. You can imagine the affects that high turnover rates have on persons served. Sunrise Northeast stives in developing supportive relationships while cultivating a family centered environment. Continuity of care plays a major role in achieving this.

Sunrise Northeast's mission focuses on creating a healthy and safe environment for all persons served. Sunrise Northeast's staff should be awarded the same and provided affordable health care. The agency is unable to do this under the current funding guidelines. While the agency was able to provide COVID bonus compensation to our employees utilizing federal dollars it is a gamble to rely on additional federal support. We need the State to make a strong commitment to nonprofits and approve the \$461 million dollars over the next 5 years for community nonprofits and appropriate funds for affordable healthcare plans.