

Mr Chairman and committee members,

My name is Vern Carpenter, I work for Job Connection Incorporated in Billings. I provide Supported Employment and Supported living services to adult clients who have developmental disabilities. Many of my clients are dual diagnosis as well, in that they also have mental health diagnosis or other disabilities. The majority of my time is spent providing supported living services. I am the Payee for some of my clients, that is I manage their finances, pay their bills, develop a budget, and so on. I am also an advocate for these clients with other agencies, their employers, neighbors, social service agencies, the court system, and in the community at large. The clients I serve are reliant on me for assistance in communication, understanding benefits, reading and responding to mail and other documents to insure the continuation of needed services. I assist them with problem solving in a wide range of issues and activities, crisis management, and referral to other professionals and needed services. Our clients also need assistance with transportation issues, whether it is learning a bus route, getting a drivers license, or purchasing, maintaining and getting repairs on their own vehicles. I also teach and train clients in life skills such as cooking, cleaning, hygiene, home maintenance and shopping skills. I also lead a Moral Reconciliation Therapy class, in which I am certified, to clients who have had trouble with the law or have anger management or addiction issues. The courts, corrections and treatment facilities are not set up to provide services to the individuals we work with. My job is not an 8 to 5, Monday through Friday endeavor. I am basically on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to assist clients dealing with crisis or perceived crisis to the clients, handle emergencies of all types, medical referrals, or just comforting or talking to a client having a hard time dealing with

an issue or just needing advice and encouragement. If I am not available, clients can end up in a crisis with law enforcement, the mental health system, or become withdrawn, confused, or suffer emotional trauma that can disrupt their jobs, families, relationships and living situation. It is important that I am involved to prevent exploitation and abuse from others as well. My relationship with my clients is a therapeutic relationship as well as an emotional attachment. Our clients for the most part do not handle change, whether it is in their daily routine or changes in the people that work with them. I bring to my job many years of education and a wide variety of experience. I did not choose this work for the money, but I am making less now than I have ever made. I have not had a raise in nearly 4 years. I have clients who make more per hour than I do. When I came to work at Job Connection nearly 5 years ago all the employees were degreed professionals. That is no longer the case. It is hard to attract someone with a 4 year degree, with the rate of compensation and benefits our company can offer, with no guarantee of future increase in wage under the current level of state funding levels. Prior to working at Job connection I taught High school to at risk youth at the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch, and developed and ran an Alternative school on the Crow Indian Reservation. I am committed to continuing to provide the much needed services and the professional and compassionate care to the clients I serve. I hope that the State of Montana would provide the same level of commitment to these special people who without these services would be lost, hopeless, and unable to function within our communities.

Mister Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Stuart Brownlow and I live in Helena.

I want to tell you how much you help me. The money you give help people like me keep a job. I have worked at Safeway's for 19 years with the help of Vern, my job coach. He helps me when I have problems and is my good friend.

I bag groceries and take in carts. I love my job and want to be able to keep it. With your help I will.

Please keep helping us.

Thank you for letting me talk today. Do you have any questions?