

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Increase payment for caregivers

On Tuesday, representatives with the Madison Haywood Developmental Services visited with The Jackson Sun's editorial board to discuss current issues facing the Tennessee Community Organization.

The Tennessee Community Organization's primary purpose is to bring attention to the state Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities budget and urge lawmakers to include a rate increase to help area agencies build a more attractive wage rate into their budget. One of the group's top priorities is paying day services trainers and residential caregivers a more competitive wage.

Currently, Madison Haywood Developmental Services has a 40 percent turnover rate annually, according to Bill Brewer, executive director of the agency. He said his organization is faced with employing people who have the natural ability to do the job but can't pay a competitive wage to keep them for the long term.

The agency briefly explained some of the duties of

a day services trainer and a residential caregiver. A day services trainer coaches a group of seven to eight adults ranging in age from 30 to 59 who all have an intellectual disabilities. Many of them also have behavioral and physical impairments. The day services trainer will also help the adults stay on task, improve their vocational skills and will accompany them on outings in the community for social skills development. The position also requires the trainer to take care of all of the adults' personal needs.

Employees such as the day services trainer and the residential caregiver start out making \$8.50 an hour. Minimum wage in Tennessee is \$7.25 an hour. Madison Haywood Developmental Services hopes state legislators will be able to support the 65 Tennessee Community Organization agencies across the state to increase state funding that would add \$1 an hour to the starting out rate.

The \$1 an hour increase would mean an additional \$20 million dollars to the budget. The increase would

also trigger a 2:1 federal match, making a 200 percent return on the investment, at \$60 million dollars for the budget.

We believe this proposal is worthy of serious consideration by the state.

Workers such as those employed by Madison Haywood Developmental Services deserve a higher wage for the challenging work that they do with residents of our community who - through no fault of their own - have an extremely high level of need. It is difficult, yet rewarding, work that requires an incredible amount of patience and love to be done correctly.

It is also a job that requires an increasing amount of training, which represents a problem when there is high turnover.

We believe more competitive salaries would allow organizations such as Madison Haywood Developmental Services to better retain good employees, operate more efficiently and, ultimately, provide better care to the people they serve.