



May 5, 2026

Subject: SEIU 1199NE Position in Support of S-2882 with Proposed Sub A – Organizing Rights for Direct Support Professionals in the Self-Directed Program

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services:

On behalf of SEIU 1199NE, representing approximately 7,500 workers across Rhode Island — primarily in healthcare settings such as hospitals, nursing homes, and federally qualified health centers — including approximately 1,800 Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) who provide care to individuals with physical disabilities and older adults in the home, we write in support of S-2882 with proposed amendments to be incorporated into a Sub A. We are also submitting a legal opinion analyzing a prior version of these proposed amendments, and have since made a small number of targeted revisions to address the issues identified in that review.

In Rhode Island, there are two primary groups of home-based caregivers who provide essential care to individuals in their homes. The first are Personal Care Attendants (PCAs), who care for individuals with physical disabilities or age-related needs. The second are Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), who provide care to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) through the self-directed supports program.

Both groups perform the same essential, hands-on work that allows Rhode Islanders to live with dignity and independence in their communities. However, until recently, neither group had the right to organize and collectively bargain with the state.

In 2023, the General Assembly took an important step by granting organizing rights to PCAs after extensive collaboration and legal review, and those workers are now negotiating their first contract. However, DSPs in the ID/DD self-directed program still do not have those same rights.

This is not a new or untested model. SEIU 1199NE already represents both PCAs and DSPs in Connecticut, and other SEIU affiliates represent similar workers in several states across the country, including Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Washington, and Oregon. These

experiences demonstrate that this framework can work effectively while preserving participant self-direction.

S-2882, along with the proposed amendments to be incorporated into a Sub A, builds on that proven model by extending the same structure to DSPs.

Under this framework, the core structure of self-direction does not change. Consumers remain the employer for purposes of hiring, scheduling, and directing care, while the state continues to set and fund key aspects of the program such as wage structures and reimbursement rates.

As we worked to apply this model to the ID/DD program, we engaged directly with consumer advocates, participants, and other stakeholders to identify concerns and ensure those concerns were fully addressed. Through that process, we have developed amendments that we are recommending be incorporated into a Sub A, which include clear and explicit protections for participant self-direction, service budgets, and decision-making authority.

In many cases, protections like these are addressed through the collective bargaining process and incorporated into contracts. However, based on direct input from consumer employers and advocates, we made the deliberate decision to include these protections directly in statute to provide clarity, certainty, and reassurance from the outset.

The goal of this bill is not to take any rights away from consumer employers. Participants will continue to hire, fire, schedule, and direct their workers. They will continue to control how their care is delivered.

What this bill does is create a structure for workers to come together and advocate for improvements in wages and working conditions. Right now, DSPs have no meaningful way to do that. They do not have the resources or leverage to push for changes that are necessary to sustain this workforce.

That lack of structure contributes directly to instability in the ID/DD system. High turnover, difficulty recruiting workers, and inconsistent care are all signs of a workforce that is underpaid and undervalued.

S-2882 with the proposed amendments to be incorporated into a Sub A is about stabilizing this system and ensuring that caregivers can earn a decent living with dignity and respect. When workers are supported, the people they care for benefit as well.

We urge the Committee to pass S-2882 with the proposed amendments to be incorporated into a Sub A.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Moore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the "e".

Alex Moore

Political Director

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