

Disability Community Advocates Meet with Lawmakers and Share Stories about Issues Facing the Disability Community

May 2024, Raleigh, NC – Over 100 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and caregivers attended the Intellectual or Other Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) Legislative Caucus Listening Session held on May 14, 2024, at the NC Legislative Building.

The listening session, led by Rep. Zack Hawkins (D - District 31) who is co-chair of the I/DD Caucus, included 10 senators and representatives representing districts across the state. They came to meet and learn from individuals with I/DD who are currently facing barriers in receiving the supports and services they need to live their lives to their fullest potential and in the community setting of their choice.

Twenty individuals from Boone to Wilmington came to the NC Legislative Building to share their stories about what having an Innovations Waiver can do for them and for some, how it has helped them.

Following the event, the Caucus leaders held a press conference to raise awareness of the 17,800 Innovations Waiver Waitlist, which has a nine-year waiting period. Rep. Hawkins introduced and announced the support of [House Bill 1003](#), which calls for an increase of DSP wages and slots for the Innovations Waiver, including a development of a 10-year-plan to address the Registry of Unmet Needs.

The waitlist is paired with the shortage of Direct Support Professionals or individuals who support people with I/DD daily. The shortage crisis is caused by low wages that are not sustainable with today's cost of living.

With higher wages available in other competitive industries, such as retail and hospitality, I/DD community advocates are pushing to increase the hourly wage to \$18/hour to make it a competitive industry. The crisis was looming before the COVID-19 pandemic and grew exponentially afterward.

What rang true throughout the entire event was the importance of sharing stories.

“Your presence here today makes an impact,” said Senator Jim Burgin, who continues to advocate on behalf of the I/DD community across the state.

“You showed up today. You made the drive. You shared your stories,” said Rep. Hawkins to the families and individuals at the hearing. “And, one thing we know for sure is that if legislators hear from a community enough, it will be the talk of the General Assembly. So everybody needs to be talking about I/DD. So when Innovations Waiver comes up, when the DSP crisis comes up, they will all know what we’re talking about. You being here is moving a needle.”

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