Since March when the coronavirus pandemic upended our everyday life, workers in CT’s I/DD qualified provider community have continued to work tirelessly and courageously to keep residences and other essential programs for people with I/DD staffed and safe. As a result, people with I/DD supported by Connecticut’s community-based provider network, experienced much lower rates of infection and morbidity than most other states.

But these front-line workers, who put their and their families’ health at risk, often while working more than one job, have been chronically undervalued and underpaid due to inadequate services rates imposed by the State of Connecticut. In 2018, the legislature voted to boost wages for workers at I/DD agencies to $14.75 per hour. However, legislation to universally increase the minimum wage to $15.00 per hour in 2023 will once again make I/DD agency employment a minimum wage job. The net effect will be disastrous staff turnover that will negatively affect the quality of care provided.

In addition, the community-based provider organizations that support over 90% of people with I/DD have been, frequently unsuccessfully, competing with hospitals, nursing homes, and state agencies to procure PPE and other needed equipment to keep people with I/DD and provider staff safe from infection from COVID-19.

If the lives of people with I/DD and the dedicated employees who care for them are truly valued, then the state must increase the rate tables and designate Direct Support Professionals as “essential.”