

Taylor: Pay those who care a fair wage

By William J. Taylor, Guest columnist
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There are 100,000 human services workers in Massachusetts caring for our children in day care centers, assisting our parents and grandparents to stay in their own homes, caring for troubled families and troubled children, housing the homeless, and providing a host of services for people with disabilities, from employment to specialized housing.

They care for those we love most, but somehow in the rush of our daily lives, we have together trivialized their efforts and marginalized their lives by paying poverty wages; not even close to living wages. Few of us as citizens, taxpayers, legislators or governors would have knowingly allowed this to happen. Most people of good will want to see it corrected.

Most people hearing about the problem for the first time find it hard to believe that these workers, who we so depend upon to do the right and caring thing, have had no across-the-board contract rate increases since 1987. Such a long 21 year history allows us to too easily blame our predecessors, rather than take responsibility today for what we must do now. Studies show that our aging state population will require 134,000 human service workers in just seven years.

Who will do this work? What colleges will send their students out to earn \$11 or \$12 per hour? What parents, caring about their children's welfare, would advise a career today in human services?

Fortunately there is an opportunity to change this inimical practice. By unanimous votes the House and Senate have passed a bill that would establish a rate setting commission that would be mandated to pay "fair and adequate" rates throughout the human service industry. The governor has promised publicly to sign such a bill should it reach his desk. He has until July 31st to do so.

While the full benefits of this legislation are two or three years away, at least the end of what has been so wrong for so many is finally in sight. Until the full effects of the bill become law, staff will continue to perform their skilled work in caring relationships with those we love.

I urge the governor to sign this bill soon, and I urge everyone with loved ones cared by these special people to thank them for all they do.

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