



March 21, 2013

Co-Chairs Bates and Nathanson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Bickett, I am the Executive Director of, Community Pathways, a small non-profit support services brokerage in the Portland Metro Area. We serve 405 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Community Pathways is one of 13 support service brokerages that serve over 7,000 individuals to live and work in the community around the State.

Support Services are founded on the premise that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are in the driver's seat – each customer has a budget based on their assessed needs. Using that budget, they work with their brokerage Personal Agent to pick from a menu of services that support their health and safety to live and work in homes and communities of their choice. A brokerage personal agent is a customer's link to an outside, independent resource, that can support them in realizing and achieving their goals while minimizing the public funding required for their basic health and safety.

For instance, several years ago when I myself was a Personal Agent, at another Brokerage, we helped one of our customers develop and implement a plan to leave an abusive situation and live in her own apartment with her boyfriend. Our strong relationship with her allowed us to develop the supports she needed to live independently. Without this plan, she would have had to move into a 24-hour publically funded program. I still see her with her boyfriend out in the community today and we developed this part of her plan more than seven years ago.

We provide a critical service that result in saving real dollars for the State that can be reinvested in other services. We are asking you to adequately fund the brokerage system so that we may access the resources and quality workforce to continue to do the work that you and our customers have asked us to do. We have proven that we provide cost effective supports that allow people to build an independent life in their communities.

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OREGON SUPPORT SERVICES ASSOCIATION



Despite our successes, we have faced significant funding decreases. With these decreases we have experienced the following negative impacts to our system and the health and safety of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities:

- Decreased ability to monitor services because our quality assurance positions were cut in 2011, which is concerning to CMS, our staff, and most importantly, our customers.
- Decreased ability to help develop new systems and providers to serve customers; and
- Increased turnover in Personal Agents, who are the cornerstone of brokerage services because we cannot pay them enough to support their own families.

Without adequate funding of service coordination, it becomes difficult to keep costs down, thus eroding services and ultimately increasing costs. We are expected to serve customers with higher needs, our workloads have consistently grown and our budgets cut over the past four years.

Support services brokerages are proof that investing in a quality system can lead to quality outcomes that reduce dependency on the system. However, as our funds dwindle and we are forced to make cuts to our staff and services, we find it increasingly difficult to respond to needs, and to research and develop adequate resources.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bickett
Executive Director
Community Pathways, Inc.

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