



Building Partnerships
with people with
developmental
disabilities, their
families, our employees
and communities.

Testimony given before the Joint Ways and Means

Human Services Subcommittee of the Oregon State Legislature

Presented by Joanne Fuhrman, Associate Director

Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.

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Co-Chair Bates, Co-Chair Nathanson, and members of the committee

My name is Joanne Fuhrman and I am the Associate Director and Co-founder of Partnerships in Community Living, (PCL). PCL provides comprehensive 24 hour services to people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in 8 counties throughout Oregon on contracts amounting to \$22 million a year. I am also currently serving as the President of the Board of Directors for the Oregon Rehabilitation Association (ORA) whose nonprofit members provide jobs and homes to people with disabilities across the state.

Almost 30 years ago I was a Direct Support Professional. After spending some time at Fairview Training Center, I decided to change my college major and dedicate my professional life to seeking social justice for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). To that end, my partner and I started PCL in 1985 with the goal of provide all people with I/DD, regardless of the challenges they face and the significance of their disability, the right to pursue a fulfilling life. All the while, making sure their health and safety was provided for.

Together, Oregon's nonprofit provider system has created services that Oregon can be proud of. The comprehensive and support systems offer a spectrum of services that meet the needs of Oregon's most vulnerable citizens and is based on strong values, ethics, and it is cost effective. This has been done despite the funding challenges and rising cost of service delivery. HOWEVER, after years of budget reductions, added requirements, no cost of living adjustment for 4 years, and a 6 percent budget cut two and a half years ago, the comprehensive 24 hour system is at the breaking point. As a member of the Oregon Rehabilitation Association, I know this first hand as I have watched several organizations that have been forced to exit people from services or close their doors completely due to these reductions.

Over the last 10 years, the needs and the challenges of those we support have become more critical and present an increased risk of harm to themselves, those who support them, and the their community. Most people that enter our services do so through a crisis system and have already been through several residential placements due to the

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extreme nature of their needs such as mental health issues, drugs, alcohol, and community safety issues. On the other hand, we are also dealing with an aging population with increased physical and medical support needs. All these individuals require a skilled and stable workforce and organizations with sound infrastructure and quality assurance systems. As a result of budget cuts over the last several years, organizations like PCL have already scaled these important costs to the bare bones.

Without increased and stable funds to meet the needs of those we serve and the people who coordinate and provide those services, our system will break.

If we have the time today, I could share story after story of people who left Fairview with challenges that required two to three staff with them at all times to keep them and others safe. Now, years later, they are successfully sharing a home and staff with one or two other peers. Let me tell you about Frank. When he left Fairview he was "labeled" as one of the most *difficult people to support*. He had 2 staff with him 24 hours a day and had to be transported in a secured vehicle. When Frank met you, he would introduce himself by saying, "Hi! I am Frank. I am a two on one." It broke my heart that he defined himself that way. Now, 14 years later, Frank lives with a friend who also needs intensive supports. He still has periods of intense supervision, but mostly he and his roommate share staff. Frank works every day and has long term friends in his community. Best of all, the other day, for the first time, I heard him introduce himself in this way, "Hi, my name is Frank. I think you are doing a great job." These are the moments that keep me going and why I am here asking you to help us give these important members of our society a chance to be supported in ways that provides for their long term health and safety and gives them a real opportunity to contribute to the communities in which they live.

We are asking for \$15 million in General Funds to help our nonprofit system survive. We deliver these services more efficiently and with more quality than any other option. If the State breaks these organizations, the result will be much higher in human and economic costs.

Thank you,

Joanne Fuhrman, PCL Associate Director