

**Testimony to the Joint Ways and Means Sub-Committee on Human Services**

**RE: DHS Budget - HB 5026**

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My name is Alan Smith. I live in Monmouth and am the parent of Emily, a daughter with Down Syndrome. Emily has been receiving various forms of support services financed by the State of Oregon since birth. First of all, I want to say how much I appreciate that support and how crucial that support has been in helping Emily achieve the life that she currently has. She is a vibrant, well-known, loved member of our community.

Emily is 36 years old. She lives in her own apartment, but requires support for many basic independent living skills such as meal prep, shopping, cleaning, transportation, etc. Emily works in Monmouth twenty (20) hours per week; walks to and from work most days; and needs support staff at work.

Emily receives support from the direct care and employment professionals at Partnerships in Community Living, Inc. (PCL). To Emily these people are more than just workers providing a service, they are her friends, people she cares about and who care about her, people who know Emily and how to work with her.

Emily has behaviors that can make her difficult to work with. The people who work with her need patience, a sense of humor, creativity, the ability to understand her psychology and motivations, and the strength to stand up to her challenges while at the same time the flexibility to roll with her flow and help her expand her horizons and thrive.

Over the years, we've had a number of extraordinary support staff from PCL. There have also been those who for one reason or another did not work out. The biggest challenge is always when a familiar support person moves on and we have to start over with new staff. The issue of turnover is a constant problem. It's especially hard for Emily both because of the loss of a familiar companion and because the changes to her normal routines can end up having a negative ripple effect on her, her family, and the people who interact with her throughout the day. We've had to develop special training to bring new hires up to speed on Emily. But it takes time and expense to do that, and we're always so grateful when we don't have to deal with training new staff.

As I have said, the support professionals are highly skilled, dedicated people who often go above and beyond their basic job. It amazes me that they are willing to do all they do while being paid little more than minimum wage. To me, a reasonable, living wage for these professionals is a matter of simple fairness. Beyond that is the fact that a fair wage will also help reduce turnover, and this reduction in training costs will go a long way to mitigating the costs of higher wage rates.

I strongly encourage the Legislature to look closely at this issue and do what you can to make additional funds available to increase pay for direct support professionals working with people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.