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communities where
people with disabilities
live rich, fulfilling and
inclusive lives.

March 16, 2015

**ORA Testimony to the Senate Committee on Workforce
Chris Burnett, Executive Director, ORA**

Good afternoon. For the record my name is Chris Burnett and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Rehabilitation Association or ORA.

Who we are:

Our Association and our members' employment activities go back nearly half a century and today is made up of **49 nonprofit organizations in communities** throughout the state that provide support, jobs and housing for adult Oregonians with disabilities.

The mission of our Association is to support and advocate for our members as they work to help individuals with disabilities lead full and inclusive lives.

Twenty-one of our member organizations have met the requirements to be designated as Qualified Rehabilitation Facilities under Oregon's Products of Individuals with Disabilities Law.

Some of these same agencies who support individuals in the QRF program are participating in Employment First and have been awarded transformation grants to expand their capacity to provide community employment supports.

ORA is working with the transformation grant technical assistance contractors to support the effort to expand provider capacity to achieve community employment jobs.

We estimate that today between 4,000 and 4,500 Oregonians with a wide range of disabilities are employed through the Products of Individuals with Disabilities Law but only 400-500 individuals working on QRF contracts are earning productivity based wages. These are the individuals who most likely would have



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hours reduced or jobs lost if a single wage parameter is implemented. (See note on the Vermont experience below.)

Who is supported on QRF contracts?

I want to thank Senator Gelsler for clearly articulating the difference between a QRF and a sheltered workshop or facility based employment setting. They serve different populations and are funded differently.

Some individuals employed at Qualified Rehabilitation Facilities have intellectual and developmental disabilities but the majority experience mental illness, are returning veterans with disabling injuries and those with physical disabilities.

70-75% of the people receiving services in this program have no long term funding providing stability should they lose a job. They are not individuals with developmental disabilities that are covered under the Employment First initiative or the former Governor's Executive Order relating to community integration. However, many of the individuals the most at risk for losing employment or having greatly reduced hours are individuals with I/DD.

So given the context of the various populations impacted by the decisions you make here I want to emphasize a couple of key points:

- **No one is held hostage in any employment settings against their will. The door is wide open to everyone seeking employment supports at whatever level is appropriate to their needs and based on their informed individual choice. Oregon has significantly increased the resources directed to community supports so no one who wants a community job should face a barrier.**
- **Oregon has long held and retains a national leadership role in progressive supports that are person centered both for residential supports and employment supports compared to other states and continues to make steady progress in improving those supports.**



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- **Let us not move from a *person centered approach* to services to a *policy centered approach* based on someone else's definition of what is meaningful work.**
- **Our advocacy is for maximum work and the maximum wage based on the needs and desires of the individual. We applaud those parts of the Governor's Executive Order that promote informed choice and provide resources to individuals to live out their choices.**
- **The results of closing all facility based employment in other states is mixed, but in Vermont, only 36% of individuals who previously worked in a facility based setting found jobs in the open market and averaged 10 hours of work per week. (Kansas City Star, Aug. 25, 2014)**