



March 16, 2015

To: Senate Workforce Committee

From: Jaime Daignault, Executive Director, Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities

Re: Honoring the civil rights of Oregonian's with intellectual and developmental disabilities through Oregon's ongoing Employment First effort

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Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jaime Daignault. I am the director of the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities. The Council represents Oregonians with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. Our members also include representatives of state agencies and community partners that provide community-based services to this population. Together, we work to advance social and policy change so that Oregonians with developmental disabilities, their families and communities live, work, play and learn together.

The Council is federally mandated to assure that people with developmental disabilities and their families have access to services and supports that promote self-determination, independence and inclusion in all aspects of community life, including employment. Our charge is described in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act), which asserts that disability is a natural part of the human experience that in no way diminishes the rights of people with IDD to enjoy civil rights afforded to citizens without disabilities. This includes the right to have a job in the community that pays minimum wage or a prevailing wage – just like other Oregonians without disabilities.

We deeply appreciate our State's investment to implement Oregon's Employment First policy. This policy is consistent with the ideals we must uphold and is grounded in the belief that all people with disabilities can work at community businesses, earn competitive wages and contribute to their local economies. It also presumes that people with disabilities are capable of working – just like people without disabilities.

This belief also applies to people with significant disabilities. The greatest challenge to helping someone get a job is not disability but lack of understanding. What helps is creativity, technology and tenacity. People with significant support needs can and do work in Oregon businesses. We have written and video stories about Oregonians with significant disabilities who are working that I would be happy to share with you.

At the same time, we understand that not all people with IDD will choose competitive employment. Subsequently, we urge the state to prioritize day services provided in the most integrated setting that connect people to age-appropriate activities in community according to each person's interests and preferences. These services must be consistent with federal regulations that enhance quality and provide additional protections to people with IDD to receive services in the most integrated setting.

We understand Employment First is a process and expect careful planning to assure that people do not lose their services, that people experience person-centered planning and that they are

fully informed of available service options. We also expect that service providers receive assistance to make necessary changes to their business models.

People with IDD want to work. According to Oregon's 2013 National Core Indicators data, 3 out of 5 people with IDD surveyed (or 60%) said they don't have a competitive job but want one. We also know that people with IDD care about this issue. In fact, employment has been an important issue for Oregonians with IDD for nearly three decades. In 1986, People First of Oregon (a network of local self-advocacy groups led by people with IDD), published a "Bill of Rights." In this document, they stated:

- We have the right to a job in the community.
- We want to work regardless of productivity.
- We have the right to be respected on the job.
- We do not want to live in poverty.
- We want to work for fair wages.

Thirty years later, self-advocates are still banging this drum. The Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition is a statewide network of local self-advocacy groups. They work to engage people with IDD and their communities to address issues that are important to them. Employment is one of the issues they care about. In their 2012 position statement on employment, they articulated their belief that all people with IDD should have living wage jobs in their communities. Additionally, they stated:

- People with IDD should be paid prevailing wages – not subminimum wages;
- People with IDD have the right to opportunities for integrated competitive employment – not just sheltered employment; and
- People with IDD have the right to access services and supports provided by well-trained staff that help them find and keep competitive jobs in their communities.

Clearly these people know what they want. These demands are consistent with their civil rights articulated in federal laws and also compliment Oregon's Employment First efforts.

Oregon families want to see their sons, daughters and family members with IDD employed and participating in community life. Data from a 2014 member survey conducted by Oregon's Family Networks, show that families of young children have high expectations for their futures.

- 75% believe their child will live independently as an adult;
- 82% believe their child will have a paying job; and
- 95% believe their child will live a safe and healthy life.

These data reflect a growing demand for services designed to help the people who need them achieve desired outcomes – outcomes that all of us want for ourselves and our children regardless of disability. This trend is happening both in Oregon and nationally.

Further, the Council, in collaboration with the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services recently published a transition guide for students with disabilities and their families. The guide provides comprehensive information that students, families and transition teams need to develop service plans that help a student move from school to successful integration into work, post-secondary education and other facets of community life.

Employment First will help us be prepared for the current and future generations of self-advocates who expect to work alongside their fellow community members for competitive wages. It is time for Oregon to welcome these people by continuing Employment First and also ending the discriminatory practice of subminimum wage for people with disabilities.

Oregonians with IDD and their families want access to the services our state is currently expanding so that more Oregonian's with IDD work at competitive jobs, earn prevailing wages, and participate in community life, as do their peers without disability. Oregon is stronger when all members of its communities work, contribute to local economies and otherwise participate in the greater good. People with IDD deserve that Oregon honor this right. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jaime Daignault". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jaime Daignault

Executive Director, Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities  
Jaime.daignault@ocdd.org

