

To Chair Keny Guyer and members of the House Human Services and Housing Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer remarks on House Bill 2239 and my support for ensuring that youth with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD) are included in the definition of “at risk” or “disadvantaged” youth.

I have spent the majority of my life professionally and personally engaging with youth and adults who experience mental, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, and as the Director of Supported Employment with Community Access Services in Portland metro, I have seen firsthand the multitudes of benefits that result from being employed.

For any working-age individual, we can see that employment brings about a fuller life, a sense of belonging, personal and professional contact, income and the other benefits of earning a wage. Individuals experiencing IDD face significant barriers to employment, indicated by a staggering 86% unemployment rate. Similarly, many youth we commonly refer to as “at-risk” or “disadvantaged” face high unemployment rates, and similar struggles to maintain employment.

Former Governor Kitzhaber recently authorized an executive order to extend employment-focused services for youth with IDD to as young as 14, and it would make sense to extend HB 2239’s impact to this population. For professionals in our field who identify community jobs, having this tax incentive as a negotiation tool can be very effective. Business owners who believe in providing work experience to community youth are still taking a chance on meeting their bottom line, and this incentive will be helpful and provide extra security. Parents and teachers of young people with IDD are finding optimism and encouragement that their child or student will have access to employment experiences through the state’s increased commitment to better serve this population. HB 2239 can provide another positive step in this direction.

Though I only have access to read the bill summary, I would also like to suggest that this tax credit is available to businesses when they employ an individual at a rate that indicates the employee is working at least 8 hours per week at minimum wage. This would ensure that all the youth covered with this bill are gaining valuable and meaningful work experience.

Thank you very much for considering my remarks, and thank you for all the great work that has already been done in this session.

Most Sincerely,  
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