

April 6, 2015

TO: House Committee on Human Services and Housing

From: Maren Gibson, Direct Support Professional Coach, Partnerships In Community Living Inc.

RE: Support for HB 2756 as amended to create task force on training for individuals who support people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

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I am a Direct Support Professional who can speak firsthand about the importance of formalized training and the damage that can be done without adequate training. I have worked in this field for almost 12 years and spent my childhood with people that experience intellectual and developmental disabilities. I am familiar with being an undertrained staff, even though our agency has one of the most extensive orientation and continuous training offered in the state. At this moment, the best way to learn the skills and knowledge needed to be a Direct Support Professional is through trial and error. When we are supporting someone's life, someone's dreams, we should be expected to have greater skills and knowledge than a high school diploma.

The role of a Direct Support Professional is often overlooked when we discuss continued care and supporting our community members. We all hear the titles often and clearly know the role of a nurse, police officer, counselor or financial advisor. We respect and trust the people with these titles. What about the people that fit the criteria for all of these professions and get none of the organized/standardized training that accompanies these professional titles? The majority of the people we are hiring are entry level, have never held a job, have no past experience with health care or IDD.

I have made a personal commitment to this field because of my life experiences. I have been willing to go through years of experiences of trial and error to become the great staff I am today. Throughout my entire career, I have also wanted more training, a greater knowledge of what my role is. Recently we have connected with the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals. In doing this, we have also began our credentialing through the College Of Direct Supports. The other Direct Support Professionals and I are so grateful for this opportunity! Having a clear expectations and a standardized training has proven useful already. All 25 of us are engaged, focused on doing our jobs well and using resources to the fullest extent. We were all waiting for something more, anything that we could grasp onto that would build us to be better supports for people with intellectual and development disabilities.

I have personally experienced so many lives changed. We changed the standard of greatness and people are rising to the occasion! In the past DSP's were doing their job well if they were following the administrative rules and if the person they supported was happy. Oregon is on the cutting edge of states who have realized that everyone has a right to a great life. Our DSP's are the people implementing these great changes that our state and nation see necessary. When our DSP's have the opportunity for further training and a greater understanding of what the end goal is, we see amazing life changes. I have personally been involved with a young man who was 17 and he experienced autism. Nearly every

interaction you had with him resulted in him being physically aggressive. Staff were managing the unsafe situations but he wasn't growing as a young man. With further training our staff was able to think outside of the box and create goals for him and build our relationships with him where physical aggression is no longer an issue. It is not because he likes us (though he does), it is because we used our greater knowledge of participant empowerment to discover that he may be struggling communicating. With the support of our DSP's, this young man talks with us over 100 times a day. He goes to school, he cooks his own meals, he cleans his own house. He introduces himself and builds friendships. This young man went from very physical, in-depth crisis prevention supports to community living and skills supports.

Direct Support Professionals are very committed to doing whatever is necessary in supporting someone in a great life. Having a standardized training that makes our roles clear and material we can continue to gain knowledge from will change this field forever. Our supports sufficient until we know better, then we must do better. We are now given the opportunity to know more and we are moving mountains with this knowledge. Please let the taskforce explore a standardized training so that the millions of people in the roles are support staff are also providing the highest quality of care.