



**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Chair Alissa Keny-Guyer  
Vice Chair Andy Olson  
Vice Chair Tawna Sanchez  
House Committee on Human Services and Housing

**FROM:** Chris Burnett, Executive Director, Oregon Resource Association (ORA)

**DATE:** March 7, 2017

**Re:** ORA Testimony on HB 2684

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Olson, Vice Chair Sanchez and members of the Committee, my name is Chris Burnett and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Resource Association (ORA).

As you have heard, we (Oregon’s provider partners) are in the midst of an unprecedented direct care workforce staffing crisis. Our staff who support individuals who experience intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) are leaving the field in record numbers due to poverty wages. We agree with the arguments made today by SEIU –immediate action is needed to resolve this statewide crisis, which is why we support the underlying goals of HB 2684.

We represent over 60 community agencies in Oregon who support individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) in agency operated, 24 hr. comprehensive services homes, as well as employment and non-work day supports. Our members are key partners with the Department of Human Services (DHS) in supporting the over 25,000 individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities in Oregon.

Comprehensive, 24-hr. wrap around services provided by community, not-for-profit providers are in place for those with the highest support needs and are what keeps people out of crisis. Our member community agencies are the difference between costly state operated crisis supports and a home in the community near family and friends, even for those with high support needs.

Unlike for-profit entities, we (your Oregon service providers) are dependent on the State for our funding. We have absorbed the rising cost of a Direct Service Professional (DSP) position without a mandate - including yearly increases when we could - without additional funding increases or COLA since 2009. The 4% rate increase effective January 1, 2016 doesn’t really get wages past the poverty stage. DSPs are the critical element of care for those who need their support to live a full, inclusive life - however, these poverty wages are forcing many to choose jobs with higher pay to support themselves and their families. This is causing critical retention and recruitment issues for service providers across the state and escalating costs of staff retraining.

While we don't support every component presented in HB 2684, we do support the intent behind it, which is why we drafted a similar bill on the Senate side (SB 238) which would require DHS to pay agencies that provide residential support services at a rate that allows them to pay an average wage that is 150% of the minimum wage. This concept builds off the statewide minimum wage increase you passed last year – ensuring regional flexibility, while increasing wages and also includes the essential element of a professional career path utilizing national best practice.

You have heard lots of support today for higher wages. It is our hope that the Chair and Sponsors of HB 2684 would convene the interested parties of these two bills (HB 2684 and SB 238) and allow us an opportunity to combine the best of both bills – essentially we are asking for a work group and more time to get this right. Together we believe there is a path forward for increased wages for DSPs.