



Partnerships in
Community
Living, Inc.

Memo

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services
Co-Chair Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, Co-Chair Representative Dan Rayfield,
and Members of the Committee

From: Joanne Fuhrman, Co-Director of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.

Date: March 28, 2017

Subject: **SB5526 - Department of Human Services - Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities**

My name is Joanne Fuhrman. I am Co-Director and co-founder of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc. (PCL). This year we celebrate 30 years of service providing home, community, and employment supports to more than 200 Oregonians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in several counties including Marion, Polk, Benton, Josephine, Jackson, Yamhill, Linn, and Lane. PCL employs over 600 Direct Support Professionals – known as DSPs. DSPs are absolutely essential in meeting our mission of, “Expanding the horizons and enhancing the quality of life of those we support.”

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue related to Oregon’s commitment to children and adults living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities(I/DD). The agency provider system is an essential part of Oregon's system of service options for Oregonians with I/DD and we are a system in a crisis. Providers like PCL are driven by our mission to provide not only services that assure people are healthy and safe, but supports where people can grow, thrive, and share their unique gifts with their communities. To this end, PCL’s number one priority is to provide competitive wages and a career track for our DSP’s. Despite PCL’s commitment to livable DSP wages (see attached chart outlining wage increases versus funding increases over the last 10 years), we simply cannot recruit and retain a workforce to do this rewarding, yet challenging work without a fair, competitive wage and the current funding does not allow us to do this. This crisis has had a devastating effect on our financial stability; of most concern to me is the affect this crisis has on the people we support, their quality of life, and potentially, their health and safety.

I have shared this description before, but it is worth repeating. DSPs are much more than caregivers. They are there for the people we support in all aspects of their lives. They are there not just for the fun times or to celebrate someone achieving a significant goal. DSPs guide people through a complicated healthcare system, they help people learn to manage themselves through anger and frustration, they are grief counselors when someone loses a family member



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or loved one, they provide complicated, intimate personal care, and sadly, they may guide someone through the end of life. **This is not minimum wage work.** Until we address this wage crisis the turnover will continue, which leads to an unstable system of support, which puts the children and adults we support at risk.

Another significant issue in our system that has been addressed with this committee is the issue of capacity and the system's capacity to meet the growing needs of children and adults with I/DD in Oregon, especially children. It is important to note that the DSP workforce crisis and capacity are closely linked. The issue of capacity cannot be completely addressed without first addressing the DSP wage crisis. PCL is ready and capable of providing supports to at least 10 of the children on the waitlist for residential supports. We have the homes and structure in place; we just cannot recruit the DSP's. This is our only barrier. We have capacity in regards of homes and expertise in our Roots Project that supports youth and adults with I/DD with complicated behavior and mental health supports; we just cannot recruit the workforce needed. A wage that is based on an average wage of at least 150 percent of minimum wage would allow us to help address this capacity issue.

Investing in DSP wages is not only the right thing to do, it is an investment that will pay dividends in outcomes. A strong, well trained DSP workforce will reduce overtime, worker's compensation, hiring, and recruiting cost to name just a few. All of these cost reductions can be reinvested into wages, benefits, and training for DSPs which will in turn incentivize the Direct Support Professional role as a real career option. In this scenario, the system wins, DSPs win, and most importantly, Oregonians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities are provided safe and quality supports that they deserve. This commitment to reinvestment is one we have made publically to our DSPs, those we support, and the families of those we serve. With your help, we can make this commitment a reality.