

Senator Hayward and Representative Rayfield, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

This past Saturday, Edwards Center held a funeral for Richard Betts. Ricky is one of over 100 people with developmental disabilities we support in Washington and Clackamas Counties, in 24 hour group homes staffed by over 200 Direct Support Professionals.

Ricky was 54 years old when he passed, peacefully with his residential staff at his side. Ricky was born blind and committed to an institution when he was just a child. After nearly 20 years there he moved into a group home. He had a job in the community. He loved Special Olympics, cheeseburgers and root beer. His favorite time of the year was the Rose Festival because he got to watch the parade.

The funeral was packed with staff who knew him over the past 30 years. The fact that so many came is a testament to those who choose to work in this field. They are consummate professionals. They prepare meals, drive carpools, pass medications, feed, toilet and bathe. And hold the hands of those they have grown to love when they take their dying breath. They answer the question so many parents of children with disabilities have "Who will love and care for my child after I am gone?"

Yet the quality of care in the lives of people like Ricky is in jeopardy. Wages at Edwards Center will be just above the minimum this July when the increase takes effect. Turnover is high. Overtime is high. And nearly half our employees are on welfare or working a 2<sup>nd</sup> job just to take care of their own families. Most leave to pursue careers that offer better wages than we can provide. There are years when cuts mean we cannot offer a raise. We have had to increase the employee contribution to our health care plan to manage the rising cost.

As a nonprofit organization, our books are open and audited. Our 990's are made public. Our homes are licensed and regulated by the Fire Marshall, OSHA, BOLI, Social Security and DHS. I invite you to review these at any time.

As representatives of all Oregonians, including people like Ricky. I implore you to support the policy option package before you and the bill to raise the wages of people like his staff.

My name is Jessica Leitner and I am the Executive Director of Edwards Center. Thank You.