



**Association of
Oregon Counties**

DATE: March 28, 2017
TO: Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services
FROM: Stacy Michaelson, Association of Oregon Counties
SUBJECT: SB 5526

Co-Chairs Steiner Hayward and Rayfield, Members of the Committee:

For the record, I'm Stacy Michaelson, Health and Human Services Policy Manager for the Association of Oregon Counties. I'm here today to share some priorities for counties regarding the Adults and People with Disabilities (APD) portion of the Department of Human Services' budget. Counties are your partners in service delivery to seniors and individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD), through both locally operated Community Developmental Disabilities Programs (CDDPs) and Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) as well as entities with which we contract to provide these services.

It is not news to this committee that there are workforce shortages in our state in various health and human services fields. This is an issue that affects many county-level programs and services, but there is a particular pinch being felt on the APD front. Individuals who work in the helping fields have not traditionally expected high-paying careers, often working out of passion and a desire to help. However, for anyone, there is a threshold of feasibility for when a particular makes sense or not. Unfortunately, there are a number of factors impacting our APD workforce that puts counties and service recipients at risk.

Between unrealistic expectations and excessively low wages, we are struggling to maintain a stable workforce. The move to a workload model has been a big help to the APD workforce, allowing for more realistic requests of workers' time and allocating additional staffing where necessary. If we decrease the workload model from 95%, it only follows that there will be challenges in expecting fewer workers to maintain the same level of output – and in this case “output” directly impacts the lives of individuals in our state. Similarly, it is unrealistic to expect a committed and well-qualified workforce to do such emotionally and physically taxing work for an unliveable wage. Without a reasonable work environment and reasonable wages, we will continue to see high turnover and struggle to recruit qualified candidates into this workforce.

Not only are there budgetary reasons to maintain a stable workforce (e.g. the high cost of hiring and training staff), but there are real human impacts as well. In many instances, case managers and direct support workers play a major role in helping individuals with I/DD to remain some level of independence and to stay in their community, rather than needing a higher level of care in a residential facility.

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With the desire to keep individuals in their homes and communities for as long as possible, we are also concerned about proposed cuts to Oregon Project Independence for seniors and individuals with I/DD. The 75% reduction being discussed would be deeply felt by many across the state, but most acutely by those who are no longer able to remain in their homes – and there will be a monetary effect felt in the budget in coming years when those folks move into settings that provide a higher level of care and cost more.

Oregon counties pride ourselves, just our legislators do, on providing person-centered services to our seniors and individuals with I/DD that respect people’s independence and dignity. In order to continue adequately serving these populations, we need continued support to maintain a reliable, qualified work force and to provide the programs and services that people have come to rely upon. While we understand the deep financial challenges our state is facing, we believe the proposed cuts in this area would have unintended consequences in terms of future cost increases and, most importantly, the impact to people’s lives.

Thank you.