



**To: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development**

**From: Corey Jeppesen, Director of Employment Services, Oregon Resource Association**

**Date: March 30, 2017**

**Re: Oregon Resource Association Testimony on HB2965**

Chair Reardon, members of the Committee, my name is Corey Jeppesen. I am here today representing the Oregon Resource Association, which to keep my tongue untied I will refer to as ORA for the remainder of my testimony. ORA's members provide the vast majority of services contracted by the Department of Human Services to provide necessary supports to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

This year ORA is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We are proud both of our history and of the good work that our members do to help people with disabilities to thrive and succeed in their communities. Without our members, life would be far different for many thousands of Oregon's most vulnerable citizens.

The roots of ORA's founding go back to a time when disability wasn't welcome in our public school system, or many other places, frankly. Institutions such as Fairview and Eastern Oregon Training Center were still the state's answer to the disability question, and they housed many hundreds of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In several locations around the state, however, parents who had refused the summons of a state institution created their own schools for their children. By 1967, when they came together to found ORA, they were already considering the next phase in their children's' lives. For most students, an education opens doors to jobs and income; but what doors were open to their sons and daughters? Seeing none, they started subcontracting with local companies to create jobs for their adult children, thus beginning the community employment movement in Oregon.

In time, those parent-spawned operations grew and became more professional. Today you might know them as Opportunity Foundation in Rep. Whisnant's district, Garten Services in Rep. Clem's district, or Sunrise Enterprises in Rep. Heard's district, to name just a few. They have become

important parts of their communities, and important partners for the state in implementing its policies toward employment for people with disabilities.

A lot has changed in the past 50 years, but at every step of the way community providers have been there to lead the way. Today, they employ thousands of people through the Products of Individuals with Disabilities Law, which leverages the purchases of public agencies to create local jobs for people with disabilities. They work individually with many hundreds of additional people, supporting them in finding and keeping integrated, competitive jobs in their communities. They train, they coach, and they help people discover not just their aspirations, but the best parts of themselves. In short, as a partner with Employment First, they are working hard to transform themselves to meet the policies of the state and the settlement agreement of Lane v. Brown.

For those reasons, and many more, while we support the idea of a task force ORA encourages this body to remember the contributions of community employment providers and their importance within the overall system. We also hope that this committee, as well as the task force, will remember that individual choice is essential. Jobs are not “one size fits all,” and everyone deserves some say in what work they do and where they do it.

For example, on February 24, 2017 ODDS and Employment First published a report for Governor Kate Brown titled “Sheltered Workshop Closures and Client Use of Services.” The report examined outcomes resulting from the closure of four sheltered workshops between December 2014 and June 2016 by comparing what services individuals were using three months before the closure of the workshop to what they accessed three months after the closure was complete.

There is a lot to celebrate in the report. The number of people receiving employment path services in the community went up dramatically. More than a quarter of the individuals affected enrolled for services with vocational rehabilitation. Hours worked in individual supported employment among the group went up as well.

It is Oregon’s policy, and one of the guiding principles of the report referenced in HB2965, that disability employment policy should provide “effective and meaningful experiences in the most integrated setting appropriate.” No one, I hope, would argue with that goal. However, Employment First’s data point to some outcomes of which we should be wary. It seems probable that a large number of the people in the study either stopped earning paychecks or spent less time in employment after the closure of the workshops.

- Seven percent of the people in the study received no employment services at all after the workshops closed.
- The use of non-employment, day support activity services went up fairly dramatically.

- In moving from employment path–facility to employment path–community services, it is likely that many individuals went from paid work to spending time in unpaid training programs. While such training may or may not pay off for them in the long run, in the short term the effect of closing the four workshops was a reduction in their earnings potential.

To reiterate, ORA supports the goals of HB2965. Access to employment is vital for all Oregonians, including those with disabilities. However, we urge the committee and the created task force to promote and encourage as much choice as possible for Oregonians with disabilities in selecting their jobs. Every possible consequence of the task force’s recommendations, including the possibility that current employment policy may be costing people their income, should be considered. Moreover, we urge the task force to consider what is required to ensure that a robust, sustainable network of community providers remains in place to serve Oregon’s citizens with disabilities.