

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Olsen, members of the committee, good afternoon. My name is Gordon DiQuattro. I'm a Direct Support Professional, a DSP, at Alvord-Taylor in Eugene/Springfield. I'm here to talk about Senate Bill 238. I am deeply sympathetic towards, and even supportive of, this bill's intent, but I am also deeply concerned about its implementation. I'm concerned that it does not address some of the most pressing issues in my field.

As a group home worker, I understand the importance of increasing wages for Direct Support Professionals; it is badly needed. One of my best friends regularly works 40-60 hours a week, and yet she lives with her partner in a single room in someone else's home. When someone works a 10 hour shift caring for another person, clocks out, and must immediately begin to stress about how they care for themselves, their capacity for compassion, vigilance, and consistency is necessarily lowered, at no fault of the employee. Over time, this environment of constant stress often becomes overwhelming, and we lose good staff, and the individuals they support often lose good friends. Turnover is a quantifiable epidemic in my field, and it has a direct impact on the quality of life of the people you pay my agency to support. By affording group home workers the ability to live quality lives, they will be able to continue working with individuals with which they have built strong connections.

That said, as much as I support the rhetoric driving this bill, I know from experience that if the state does not stipulate that these funds are to go directly to wage increases for DSPs, then there is no guarantee those increases will be passed on to us. As you know, at the beginning of last year, the state approved a 4% funding increase that was intended to increase worker compensation. As soon as the bill was passed, Alvord-Taylor sent out an email to all of its staff stating that rising healthcare costs would result in the absorption of the rate increase. Thankfully, through our Union we were able to stop this and bargain a 12% increase in wages

for all Alvord-Taylor employees. The only reason we received the intended wage increase at Alvord-Taylor was because we have a Union, but most of my colleagues have no such organization.

We need transparency and accountability in group homes, especially when we approve rate increases for all agencies. Right now, there is unfortunately no real transparency and no accountability when it comes to ensuring that Medicaid dollars are spent improving the lives of the people we support. We need to know how our tax dollars are spent once allocated to other organizations that provide supports for some of our most vulnerable people. We need strong, clear language that both stipulates how state money should be spent, and empowers our legislators to hold these agencies accountable at every level of administration. This year, the state legislature could have the opportunity to sign into law a bill that contains the strong and empowering language that is needed to protect both Oregon taxpayers and the individuals they pay to support.

The state made a commitment when Fairview closed, that Oregonians with disabilities would be well supported in the community. There is no way to do that unless DSPs are paid a living wage, so that we can provide proper supports without worrying about how we are going to pay our rent. Just as individuals in the care of skilled nursing facilities are assured that their funds are spent to actually make their lives better, the public needs a commensurate level of transparency in group homes that can assure us that the state is fulfilling its promise to individuals with I/DD as well.

Thank you.