



MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services

FROM: Chris Burnett, Executive Director, Oregon Resource Association (ORA)

DATE: February 15, 2017

Re: ORA Testimony on SB238

Chair Gelser and members of the Committee, my name is Chris Burnett and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Resource Association (ORA). We represent over 60 community agencies in Oregon who support individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) in agency operated, 24 hr. comprehensive services homes, as well as employment and non-work day supports. The backbone of these supports are the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

You have likely seen materials from us (we sent it to every legislator) that includes the same logo you see on my pin - ***State of Emergency - A Workforce Abandoned - People at Risk***. We launched this campaign several months ago to raise awareness and to emphasize the urgency of the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce crisis and shortage. The shortage of qualified staff has escalated in recent years but was not unexpected. It has been predicted for decades but Oregon and other states have failed to recognize it and lay the groundwork for a solution. This has resulted in the exodus of qualified staff to higher paying, less complex jobs, creating a negative impact on individuals supported (you will hear more about that in later testimony) and a crushing cost of overtime. Now we are seeing provider capacity shrink when it needs to grow because they simply cannot find the staff to expand services as needed. New referrals are sometimes relegated to waiting lists for community supports which goes against the mission and purpose of community based nonprofit agencies providing Medicaid services.

You might ask where people go if there is not sufficient capacity in the system to support them? Some end up in jail, hospital emergency rooms or psychiatric hospitals or homeless on the street. Some remain with aging caregivers who can no longer support them, a situation where both the individual supported and the family member are at risk.

The workforce shortage has resulted in high cost overtime for agencies and exhaustion and burnout for DSPs. It means people with the unique skills and heart for this complex work leave the field to support themselves and their families. It's not a sustainable scenario.

Beyond a wage that recognizes their value, DSPs deserve a path to professional career development that research shows reduces staff turnover, enhances the quality and experience of the individual being

supported and is a long-term good investment for the state. The cost of staff churn and constant hiring and training for agencies bleeds precious resources away from services and the ability to pay a higher wage. Agencies don't have the capacity to just raise their rates as they are funded by Medicaid and paid fixed rates for the supports they provide.

Our proposed solution is SB238. A short and long term wage increase that recognizes the already planned increases in the minimum wage and keeps DSP wages 150% over that amount. This is not a low skill, minimum wage job, but the minimum wage is an index we could use to ensure the wage remains a reasonable percentage above it.

Regular increases and the inclusion of a training program utilizing nationally recognized best practice in credentialing of DSPs could help stem the tide of DSPs leaving the field. It could give them a way forward and a reason to stay in their specialized field of choice while minimizing the stress and trauma for those they support and with whom they have built relationships.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony. We ask for your support of SB 238.

Attached:

- **ORA Fast Facts , A System in Crisis – SB 238**
- **Cost of Compassion video – <http://www.oregonresource.org/value-the-work.html>**

