

To: Senate Committee on Human Services
From: Katie Rose, Oregon Support Services Association

Re: Support for SB 238, Requiring DHS to pay agencies amounts sufficient for agencies to pay 150 percent of minimum wage to direct support professionals

Chair Gelser and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of Senate Bill 238, which would require DHS to pay agencies providing comprehensive services to Oregonians at rates sufficient for them to pay their direct support professional staff at 150 percent of the minimum wage. Oregon Support Services Association (OSSA) is comprised of the 14 Support Service Brokerages across Oregon. We serve over 7,500 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in their own or family homes, in every community throughout the state.

The OSSA believes that Oregon is critically underfunding wages for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), the people that so many Oregonians with intellectual and developmental disabilities rely on each day. This underfunding reaches far beyond individual providers, resulting in systemic instability. As case managers of home and community-based services, we see the direct impact on people's lives when they cannot find agencies with capacity to meet their needs. Without quality support providers, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities struggle to live as members of their community.

Provider agencies are sounding the alarm: they are forced to turn away people in need. This crisis is not only felt by direct support professionals and their employer agencies. This instability stresses the entire system, and every person in it. These are just a few of the ways that this crisis is felt:

- Provider agencies are unable to keep enough staff to safely respond to crisis referrals, people in urgent need of services to stabilize. Personal crisis is inevitable. Without the ability to adequately respond to it, our system is vulnerable, and people are at risk.
- Families new to the system look for help to stabilize the home, but are unable to find providers with staff capacity to help them.
- Self-advocates with intellectual and developmental disabilities are not able to add their voices to policy workgroup meetings, committees, and legislative work due to a paucity of available DSP supports.

- Personal Agents and Service Coordinators are unable to connect people to providers to meet their identified needs, thus requiring exponentially more time from the case manager as they search for alternative supports.
- People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are not able to build trusting relationships with staff that provide intimate care, because staff turnover rates are too high.

As a state, we have made choices that devalue and jeopardize these critical services. As a state, we can make the choice to stabilize the field by raising the DSP wage. The Oregon Support Services Association supports SB 238, a stable, workable funding approach to DSP wages.

Sincerely,

Katie Rose, Executive Director OSSA
Jennifer Santiago, Community Pathways Inc.
Barbara Hedrick, Creative Supports Inc.
Bill Uhlman, Eastern Oregon Support Services Brokerage
April Wick, Full Access
Heather Hopkins-Slechta, Full Access High Desert
Rachel Grunenfelder, Inclusion Inc.
Larry Deal, Independence Northwest
Jill Sorensen, Integrated Services Network
Julia Wojciechowski, Mentor Oregon Metro
Anne Crites, Mentor Oregon Mid-Valley
Adam Ayers, Resource Connections of Oregon
Dan Peccia, Self-Determination Resources Inc.
Robin Mouser, Southern Oregon Regional Brokerage
Sarah Noack, UCP Connections