



Chair Keny Guyer and members of the committee,

Thank you, for allowing me to submit testimony on HB 2728 on behalf of Oregon AFSCME Council 75. Oregon AFSCME has several locals representing people working in I/DD group homes. We have Local 3213, Albertina Kerr in Marion County, Local 2746-3 Coast Rehabilitation, Local 1766 Rainbow Adult Living, and Local 3505 Star of Hope, all of which are private non-profit group homes. We also represent Local 1246 the Stabilization and Crisis Unit, which are the state operated group homes that care for people who have no other options for placements.

We know that there is a crisis in the I/DD system with high turn-over and difficulty hiring support professionals to care for residents of the group homes throughout the state, including at the Stabilization and Crisis Unit. Low wages are a major contributor to this crisis and we appreciate the call to raise wages. The work of caregiving is very challenging. You have likely heard the difficulty involved in caring for individuals with a variety of needs and being there for the residents on good days and bad. For many support workers, the residents that they care for are like family. Even still, it is difficult to stick with it when the employee can't support their own needs and pay their bills.

The I/DD system is exactly that, a system that intends to provide appropriate levels of support that individuals need. While some may live on their own or with family with minimal support, others may be best served in group homes with 24 hour staffing. The Stabilization and Crisis Unit cares for individuals who have no other housing and support options. The residents of SACU are there because they are in crisis and are being turned away from private non-profit homes, are no longer able to be cared for by their families or are coming from other institutionalized settings such as prison, jails and the state hospital. SACU is not allowed to turn anyone away. Private non-profit settings can and sometimes do.

Last June in a presentation to the Stabilization and Crisis Unit Task Force on Client and Staff Safety, DHS laid out the demographic numbers of the residents of SACU. One hundred percent have co-occurring mental health diagnosis. To summarize what the co-occurring and types of diagnoses meant DHS provided this:

“What does it all mean?

- Individuals frequently have multiple diagnoses, both developmental and mental health. For example, an individual might have:
 - a IQ falling in the mild range (intellectual disability)
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder and Seizure Disorder (developmental disability)



- Bipolar and Anxiety (mental health diagnoses)
- Intermittent Explosive Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (personality disorders)
- Higher IQs, a point or two away from being not eligible or DD only
- ***Often individuals have failed community placements***

We should absolutely be raising the wages of support professionals and other care givers. They are all drastically underpaid. Wage increases should be for all support employees in the I/DD system and should include the employees of SACU.

I am happy to answer any questions in person or by email. I also welcome the continued conversation on raising wages for care givers of all types.

Sincerely,

Eva RippetEAU
Political Coordinator
Oregon AFSCME Council 75