



To: Chair: Representative Keny-Guyer
Vice-Chair: Representative Sanchez
Vice-Chair: Representative Stark
and Members of the Committee

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

Date: February 16, 2017

Subject: **House Committee on Human Services and Housing: HB 2728**
Requires Department of Human Services to pay comprehensive services providers at service rate that is no less than rate paid by department for similar services provided by personal support worker or by direct care provider in secure residential treatment home of facility.

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Sanchez and Vice Chair Stark 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. These agencies include those who support individuals who have the same level of support needs as those currently residing in SACU, both adults and children, but at considerably lower rates or reimbursement.

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.

As a result:

- **There has been an exodus of qualified staff to higher paying jobs creating a negative impact on individuals supported.**

- **Provider capacity shrinking when it needs to expand because community agencies simply cannot find the staff to support new services as needed.**
- **New referrals sometimes relegated to waiting lists for community supports, going against the mission and purpose of community based nonprofit agencies providing Medicaid services.**

A recent case comes to mind when a young girl who was the victim of abuse at SACU was desperately in need of an alternate residential support setting. This young woman has very high support/behavioral needs and her mother wanted to bring her back to her home community. Despite wanting to help this family, local providers could not offer support because they did not have the staff to meet her needs and could not rob their existing children's programs to staff supports for this young woman. The mother was in crisis as she did not feel she could support her at home. A provider outside the mother's home community was able to hire a staff person to support the girl and provide in home services, but this is not always the case.

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 or families not equipped to meet their needs, a situation where both the individual supported and the family member are at risk.**
- **High overtime costs 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.**

Agencies don't have the capacity to just raise their rates to pay higher wages since they are funded by Medicaid and are paid fixed rates for the supports they provide. Those rates are not often increased to reflect the increased cost of doing business, including retaining quality staff.

A competitive living wage 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 in support of HB 2728. We hope you will take a few brief minutes to watch our video on what DSPs do in their day to day support of individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. **Cost of Compassion video – <http://www.oregonresource.org/value-the-work.html>**