



Partnerships in  
Community  
Living, Inc.

# Memo

To: Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chair Stark, & Members of the Committee

From: Joanne Fuhrman, Co-Director of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.

Date: February 16, 2017

Subject: **House Committee on Human Services and Housing -- Hearing regarding HB2728**  
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.

My name is Joanne Fuhrman. I am Co-Director and co-founder of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc. (PCL). PCL provides home, community, and employment supports to more than 300 Oregonians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in several counties including Marion, Polk, Benton, Josephine, Jackson, Linn, Yamhill, and Lane. PCL employs over 600 Direct Support Professionals – known as DSPs. DSPs are absolutely essential in meeting our mission of, “Expanding the horizons and enhancing the quality of life of those we support.”

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. **I am here in support of HB 2728.**

When it comes how rates are developed for the 24hr I/DD system I know there are many questions about how we got to this place, what is in the rate model regarding DSP wages, and what are providers doing or not doing in relation to DSP wages? The answer is complicated and a bit misleading. What we discovered in our analysis is that the current established rate model has a higher DSP wage factor than we understood, in addition, we discovered the staffing hours are significantly less than truly required to meet the needs of those we support, especially those with complicated support needs. Just this one factor resulted in PCL providing 35 percent (35%) more staffing hours than the rate model funds. The long and the short of it is that this issue is not only about wages, but how many hours we are funded to provide supports. This one factor resulted in approximately 2.2 million dollars per year in supports beyond our current funding. Just an interesting note, in order to provide a \$2.00 per hour increase to all of PCL’s DSPs, it would cost 2.4 million dollars per year.



It is also important to clarify how the average wage in the rate tool works. In order to balance an agency budget we have to keep our average wage as close to the wage number in the rate tool as possible and we also have to stay in line with the number of hours provided in the rate tool for staffing. So what does that mean regarding the average wage and why are we talking about the average wage? We have to budget an average wage to allow for a wage range. For example, we have to start new team members under the funded average wage to allow for the cost of long term employees. This is important because it leads to retention and a stabilized workforce for those we support.

As a private non-profit, PCL is driven by our mission and values. We also know that without a stable DSP workforce we cannot do right by our mission. To this end, PCL's number one priority is to provide competitive wages and to provide a career track for our DSP's. Despite PCL's commitment to livable DSP wages (see attached chart outlining wage increase versus funding increases over the last 10 years), we simply have not been able to offer the appropriate wages and benefits needed to recruit and retain long term DSPs. This crisis has had a devastating effect on our financial stability, but of most concern to me is the affect this crisis has on the people we support; their quality of life and potentially, their health and safety.

As I just mentioned, the workforce crisis has significant fiscal impact including PCL spending over 1.5 million dollars in the last year in overtime alone. I could share charts and pages of financial impact and would be happy to discuss them in detail with you at a later date if you would like, but today I would like to focus on the mission impact of the DSP crisis.

The funding issue related to our current wage and funded hours, combined with the rising wages for similar positions across the system, has made it nearly impossible for us to retain long term staff. We often find ourselves being the training ground for other parts of the system. We invest a great deal of money in training and then DSPs leave as better qualified staff for higher paying parts of the I/DD system. Of course, we are happy to see our team member's advance and earn a good wage in order to stay in our field; we would just like the opportunity to provide that same career option at PCL for the benefit of those we serve. The real frustrating part of this situation is the jobs they leave for in the other parts of our system are DSP jobs, just with a different title and better pay. How is this fair to the people we support?

I have shared this description before, but it is worth repeating. DSPs are much more than caregivers. They are there for the people we support in all aspects of their lives. They are there not just for the fun times or to celebrate someone achieving a significant goal. DSPs guide people through a complicated healthcare system, they help people learn to manage themselves through anger and frustration, they are grief counselors when someone loses a family member or loved one, they provide complicated, intimate personal care, and sadly, they may guide someone through the end of life. **This is not minimum wage work.**

Investing in DSP wages is not only the right thing to do, it is an investment that will pay dividends in outcomes. A strong, well trained DSP workforce will reduce overtime, workers comp, hiring, and recruiting cost just to name a few. All of these cost reductions can be reinvested into wages, benefits, and training for DSPs which will in turn incentivize the Direct Support Professional role as a real career option. In this scenario, the system wins, DSPs win, and most importantly, Oregonians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities are provided safe and quality supports that they deserve. This commitment to reinvestment is one we have made publically to our DSPs, those we support, and the families of those we serve. With your help, we can make this commitment a reality.

Yesterday I was listening to a women we support testify about the importance of funding to, "Keep her DSPs." She really said it best, "We need to pay them a good wage so they don't leave." For the people we support - every person for that matter - growth and happiness are connected directly to the ability to develop supportive and trusting relationships with one's support system. **For many of the people we support, the DSPs that work for them are that very support system.** They cannot develop the trust and foundation for growth and well being when that support system changes from week to week or day to day. **Please help us break this cycle by supporting HB2728.**

**PCL  
Employee Wage Movement and DD Rate Changes  
FY 2009-16**

