



Partnerships in
Community
Living, Inc.

Memo

To: Chair Gelser & Members of the Committee
From: Joanne Fuhrman, Co-Director of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.
Date: February 15, 2017
Subject: **Senate Committee on Human Resources- Hearing regarding SB238**
Requires Department of Human Services to pay agencies that contract with the department to provide comprehensive services to adults with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities amounts sufficient for agencies to pay 150 percent of minimum wage to Direct Support Professionals

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 over 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 to wholeheartedly implore you to support SB238.

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 wages and benefits needed to recruit and retain long term DSPs. This crisis has had a devastating effect on our financial stability, but of the most concern to me is the effect 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, but today I would like to focus on the mission impact of the DSP crisis. DSPs are much more than caregivers, they provide support to the people we support in all aspects of their lives. They are there not just for the fun times or when they celebrate someone achieving a significant goal, they 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.**



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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 these cost reductions can be reinvested into wages, benefits, and training for DSP's which will in turn incentivize the Direct Support Professional role as a real career option. In this scenario, the system wins, DSP's win, and most importantly, Oregonians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities are provided safe and quality supports that they deserve.

As I end my testimony, I want to leave you with a story of the real impact of having long term staff. Earlier this week I attended a celebration of life for Janice, a person that PCL has supported for 27 years. The room was full of family, long time friends, and three long term DSPs that had worked with her for 16, 17, and 20 years. They told stories of their adventures with Janice, the joy in helping her learn and grow and take charge of her life. I was moved by the beauty of celebrating her and a life well lived by people who loved and admired her. I was struck by the fact that when we met Janice, she was labeled as challenging, hard to serve, and "difficult." But, these labels will not be her legacy. With stable, long term supports she learned to trust, dream, and live the life she deserved. As we celebrated her life, I was overcome with worry and sadness, that Janice's story is the exception to the rule, and the fact that most of the people we support will not benefit from this experience. As our long term employees leave, our new workforce simply cannot afford to remain working in this field.

