

Oregon Resource Association

2405 Front St. NE, Suite 150 | Salem, OR 97301
(503) 585-3337 | oregonresource.org



To: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

**From: Paloma Sparks
Director of Government Affairs and General Counsel
Oregon Resource Association**

Date: February 8, 2017

Re: House Bill 4041

Chair Reardon, members of the Committee, I am Paloma Sparks with Oregon Resource Association (ORA). Our members provide the vast majority of services contracted by the Department of Human Services to provide necessary supports to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Last year ORA celebrated its 50th anniversary. We are proud both of our history and of the good work that our members do to help people with disabilities to thrive and succeed in their communities. Without our members, life would be far different for many thousands of Oregon's most vulnerable citizens.

The roots of ORA's founding go back to a time when individuals with disabilities were not welcome in our public schools. Institutions such as Fairview and Eastern Oregon Training Center were still the state's answer to the disability question, and they housed many hundreds of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

A lot has changed in the past 50 years, but at every step of the way community providers have been there to lead the way. Today, they employ thousands of people through the Products of Individuals with Disabilities Law, which leverages the purchases of public agencies to create local jobs for people with disabilities. They work closely with people, supporting them in finding and keeping competitive jobs in their communities. They train, coach and help people discover not just their aspirations, but the best parts of themselves. In short, as a partner with Employment First, community partners are working hard to transform themselves to meet the policies of the state and the agreements of Lane v. Brown.

ORA supports HB 4041 and encourages the committee to remember the contributions of community employment providers and the important role they play within the overall system. We urge the task force to remember that individual choice is essential. Jobs are not "one size fits all," and everyone deserves some say in what work they do and where they do it.

Last year DHS published a report titled “Sheltered Workshop Closures and Client Use of Services.” The report examined outcomes resulting from the closure of four sheltered workshops between December 2014 and January 2016. They studied what services individuals were using three months prior to the closures and what services they accessed three months after the closures were complete.

There is a lot to celebrate in this report. The number of people receiving employment path services in the community increased dramatically. More than a quarter of the individuals affected enrolled in services with vocational rehabilitation. Hours worked in individual supported employment among the group increased as well.

It is Oregon’s policy, and one of the principles of the report that disability employment policy should provide “effective and meaningful experiences in the most integrated setting appropriate.” No one, I hope, would argue with that goal. However, Employment First’s study points to some outcomes we should all be wary of. The data shows that a large number of the people in the study either stopped earning paychecks or spent less time in employment after the closure of the workshops.

- Seven percent of the people in the study received no employment services at all after the workshops closed.
- The use of non-employment, day support activity services went up significantly.
- In moving from employment path-facility to employment path-community services, it is likely that many individuals went from paid work to spending time in unpaid training programs. While such training may or may not pay off for them in the long run, in the short term the effect of closing the four workshops was a reduction in their earnings potential.

ORA supports the goals of HB 4041. Access to employment is vital for all Oregonians, including those with disabilities. We urge the committee and the task force to promote and encourage as much choice as possible for Oregonians with disabilities. Possible consequences of the task force recommendations, including the possibility that employment policies could cost people their income, should be evaluated. Finally, we ask that the task force consider what is required to ensure that a robust, sustainable network of community providers remain in place to serve Oregonians with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.