

March 18, 2020

Co-Chairs Roblan and Holvey and Members of the Committee,

We are parents of children with disabilities that experience high support needs. We are also advocates for families in our community.

As the City of Portland drafts a shelter in place plan that we anticipate other jurisdictions will align with, we are very concerned about children with Developmental Disability(DD)/Intellectual Disability (ID) and their families getting enough support.

We need clarity that, in the case of local or statewide shelter in place orders, whether Personal Support Worker (PSW)/Direct Support Providers (DPS) will be considered essential staff to continue to work in family's homes as they are able.

We are thankful to hear that Developmental Disability Services will be allowing summer-time level of support hours during this crisis period, but are concerned because families already struggle to find PSWs and DSPs to fill these hours. These support workers are also challenged, and families report that their PSW/DSP are not coming to work because of their health or a family member being elderly/immunocompromised.

In the Lane County support forum we are part of, parents are already reporting added stress after just one week. Parental burnout can lead to potentially unsafe living situations for these families. We know there already aren't enough beds for our children when in crisis, which adds to the importance of giving all the support we can in the homes.

We see some possibilities to provide increased financial and family support in this time:

If PSW/DSPs are unable to come or the shelter in place order doesn't consider them essential, could parents with children under 18 with DDS services be considered support workers as families with adult DD/ID are?

This would give families income which eases stress and decreases the likelihood of family collapse.

Approving parents as providers will limit exposure if they are able to stay home from work and aren't able to have healthy support providers in the home.

Presently, families are seeing inconsistent responses from county DD and ID staff. This confuses families and makes it clear that we need a systemic response that supports county staff as well as families. Here are two very different responses from local agencies.

A Lane County DDS case managers response as of yesterday morning was:

"To be honest we are not sure but after talking with my supervisor he said it would be unlikely they would be considered essential staff because a parent or guardian would be available to provide care and they want to limit exposure for everyone. We will filter information as it comes in since everyone is trying to figure out how to get through this crisis. It's minute by minute right now. Our office is closed to the public and I will be working from home starting next week but will be in the office on Tuesdays to process paperwork. I understand the stress this causes for all of us. Unfortunately, ODDS doesn't consider parents PSWs/DSPs. Family members can be certified to be PSWs/DSPs if they are 18 and can pass a background check but the certification process is the same and can take time. If you have a family member you would like to get certified I would encourage them to contact Rever Grand to see if they can get them certified faster than the county could. If you would like them to be certified through the county they would need to contact Drew to set up an appointment for a background check to be completed. He can be reached at 541-682-2638."

And a Rever Grand agency coordinator responded yesterday morning with this:

"I talked with my supervisor. They found out that PSW/DSP are considered essential staff. As a lot of families truly rely on their DSPs for day to day life. If you have any other questions please let me know."

It will be important to have consistent messaging on this across agencies to minimize stress and confusion. Since it is often grandparents or other older family members who serve as the non-parent support workers, that is not an option when they are at high risk for death from COVID-19.

We feel strongly that the needs of families and vulnerable children be considered thoughtfully. Doing what we can to mitigate the added stress on vulnerable families will be important during this time. Many of these families have been living in crisis for years already and the fragility of their circumstances were already direr before this COVID-19 crisis.

Would you be willing to help us work on a proposed plan for family relief that includes:

- Ensuring PSW/DSP are considered essential workers
- Temporarily allow parents to be paid as PSW/DSP workers (this already exists for the Adult DD population).
 - Bypassing lengthy background check for parents/legal guardians.

Sincerely,
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