

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jamal Robert, I live in Portland, Oregon, and I am a Personal Agent at Community Pathways, Inc. I would like to ask that Legislative Concept 52 be passed into law during this Special Session so that Oregonians experiencing I/DD can access healthcare, use support from people they trust while they are hospitalized, and have support when making end of life decisions.

I have been supporting adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in various capacities (e.g. Direct Support Professional, Supported Living Coordinator, Personal Agent) for the past six years. I cannot stress how imperative it is for individuals within the I/DD community to have access to their support providers, especially within the hospital environment.

**Expressive and Receptive Communication:** Many of my clients cannot accurately share critical information with medical professionals, which includes information about their disabilities, support needs, medications, allergies (food and medical), or history of risks (e.g. their last recorded seizure, their risk of falling). It is difficult for several of my clients to understand the information that is being communicated to them by medical professionals. They heavily rely on their support providers to translate this information in a way that makes sense to them so they can make an educated and informed decision. This interpretation comes best from support providers that actually know the client, as each person communicates and understands information in his or her own unique way.

I work with several clients that are incredibly difficult to understand verbally, cannot read/write, or are non-verbal. One client that comes to mind happened to be deaf, non-verbal, did not read or write, and did not speak American Sign Language. His support providers and I were able to communicate with him in a variety of personalized signs/gestures that he understood. We understood his gestures, facial expressions, and personal preferences, which allowed us to communicate his needs to his medical professionals. I honestly cannot imagine him going to a hospital without his support providers. He would not receive the care that he needs, he could not answer any medical questions, he would not understand anything that was going on, and his choices would not be honored. This particular customer did not have any family members that could help him advocate for his needs; his support providers were his closest form of contact.

**Mental and Emotional Support:** Several of my clients need mental and emotional supports. Their support providers have ways of helping them manage their anxiety and stress. Having someone that you truly trust that can assist you with navigating the healthcare system is insanely helpful. There are several clients that would refuse to be cooperative without the support of their support providers. This goes back to communication; support providers have a way of communicating information with their client in a calming and reassuring way that strangers cannot provide. I have a level of trust with several of my clients, which was earned because I had worked with them for six years. They know that I understand them as a person. I know their fears and concerns. And I have a way of talking things out with them so they can maintain their composure. For the I/DD population, I cannot overstate how important this is for them.

I honestly realize that I could go on and on about this topic! As a way to summarize this, support providers are an essential tool for those that experience I/DD. They are a personal translator that can interpret messages in the language that is specific to that individual. This cannot be replicated by other

interpreters, as each I/DD individual has a completely unique method of communication. Support providers are needed to accurately communicate important information to doctors (medications, support needs, etc.), as they have an intimate understanding of the individual that they support. Support providers also help to manage the mental needs of the client and can help them to be more receptive to medical supports. As someone who has directly supported individuals and coordinated their supports, I cannot stress how important this is.

Feel free to contact me if you ever want me to go into more detail, or share personal stories. Thank you so much for considering this important issue! I hope that you are all well and have a good one!

Sincerely,

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