



Partnerships in  
Community  
Living, Inc.

# Memo

**To:** Joint Subcommittee on Human Services: Co-chair Senator Lee Beyer, Co-chair Representative Rob Nosse, Senator Dallas Heard, Senator Rob Wagner, Representative Cedric Hayden, Representative Andrea Salinas, Representative Sheri Schouten, & Representative Duane Stark

**From:** Joanne Fuhrman, Co-Founder of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc. (PCL)

**Date:** February 13, 2019

**Subject:** Testimony - SB 5026

My name is Joanne Fuhrman. I am the Co-Founder of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc. or PCL. PCL is a private, non-profit organization and has been a **partner** with the State of Oregon for over 32 years providing supports at home, work, and in their communities for over 300 adults, children, and families who live and thrive with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). PCL provides these services in eight counties, including Marion, Polk, Benton, Josephine, Jackson, Linn, Yamhill, and Lane. We employ 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.” DSP’s are on the front line and integral to the quality of the person-centered services that organizations like PCL provides.

**Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about why it is so important to provide funding for DSP wages. We need \$46.1M GF as an investment in DSPs. This investment will allow providers to pay an average wage of \$15.00 per hour. This will help move us closer to our goal of professional wages for DSPs.**

PCL’s priority has always been to be a great provider of person-centered services. We can’t do this without a strong, consistent, and committed DSP workforce. As much as I am before you as an advocate for providing these critical services to Oregonians experiencing IDD, I am also here as an advocate for my employees. Those DSPs who show up every day – who do extremely important – but also mentally, physically, and emotionally challenging jobs every day. I can’t do this without them. And, I want them to know they are valued. Despite our commitment to fair, complete DSP wages and the fact we have passed every increase provided by past legislators directly to DSP wages, we still cannot keep up with the increased competition in the workforce. When local fast food restaurants are starting at \$13.00 - \$15.00 per hour we simply cannot compete. As wages in these industries rise and minimum wage goes up every year, our starting wage gets closer to minimum wage. **DSP work is not a not minimum wage job.**

As you heard last week, I can’t simply raise my prices. We are partners in this with you and depend on your funding and investment in the services we provide. Together, we can show we value the work DSPs do for Oregonians every day. We can raise their wages.

DSPs are much more than caregivers, they provide support in all aspects of a person's life. 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. I started my career as a DSP, I know the joys and the struggles of this job. **This is not minimum wage work. Each year that goes by without addressing wage issues for the DSP workforce, the crisis gets worse and our provider system comes closer to collapse.**

Workforce shortages wreak havoc on the financial stability of the State's non-profit I/DD provider partners. Overtime cost, as well as the constant cycle of recruitment, hiring, and training drain scarce resources that are needed to provide quality services. DSP shortages (PCL has had between 80 - 100 open DSP positions at all times over the past four years) means DSP, Managers, and Executive team members alike are working 60 - 80 hour work weeks, for weeks on end to make sure the people we serve get the supports they need, are promised, and deserve. With these conditions, we simply have not been able to offer the wages or benefits needed to recruit and retain long term DSPs. **As I said, 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; it is their quality of life, and potentially their health and safety, that concerns me and the entire provider community the most.**

Investing in DSP wages is not only the right thing to do, but it is also 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 win and are provided safe and quality supports that they desire and deserve.