

Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Nosse and members of the Committee,

My name is Mercedes Gutierrez, and I am a case manager with Multnomah County for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. I am honored to be here today to speak with you about the work my coworkers and I do to support Oregonians with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

My job is to identify issues before they become a crisis so our clients live safe, independent, and healthy lives.

I am here today to talk about the difference it makes for those of us who work directly with clients, when the system is fully funded, and when it is not.

Funding determines the amount of time we're able to spend with a participant. And case management timelines can be the difference between a child remaining at home with family, or going into a foster care or institutional setting. The stakes are incredibly high.

To give you an example of the time constraints I'm under, I wanted to paint a picture of a typical day. Yesterday, I began my day with going to a home of one of my clients to complete an assessment; ISP, PCI and RIT. For a typical assessment it takes me a minimum of three hours to gather and build a plan with a team to support the kiddos that I serve to be independent and feel included into our communities. I then drove to my work station, which generally takes a minimum of 30 minutes due to traffic and distance. I worked on the required billing and documentation to meet the state guidelines. I worked on administrative tasks for a couple of hours and then met with my supervisor to discuss a couple of strategies to help several children who are at risk of losing their school placement.

It was already 2pm and I drove to another home to complete another assessment. During my drive to the home I received a call from one family's mother, she had lost her home and became homeless losing all her belongings. I tried to help her as much as I could with the resources available, but was not able to find her an immediate resolution to her housing needs. This mother has two of her children with disabilities used to structure and routine, and is now out in the street or in a hotel as last resort, spending their low savings. This is a mother with children that do not do well outside the home and are used to home's structure and feeling safe.

It broke my heart and as much as I wanted to help her, I was not able to spend the time to triage this situation due to the rest of my caseload.

I pride myself on hard work and solid time management, but I am struggling to keep up. My caseload size is about 60 when it should be 45, stretching me too thin. Here's one example of how that played out for one of my participants:

As a case manager, I had the opportunity to advocate for one of my clients at a medical setting where due to a language barrier and miscommunication, my client was not receiving the medical care that he needed and went through unnecessary pain and suffering after a surgery. I met with the surgeon, nutritionist, and parents to address the medical concerns that the parents had for my client. After my client visited the hospital for the third time and receiving no answers, I joined the family and was able to resolve the medical questions and concerns. After that day, my client went back to healing from his surgery. I can assure you that if I had the time to advocate for my client at earlier stage in the process, I would had done it, but due to the caseload size, I was not able to.

In my role as a case manager, I often face the need to prioritize and make tough choices instead of being able to support all my clients as much as they need.

Yes, I do have success stories as well, but not as many glowing successes as I would like, as my purpose in life is to help people.

The good news is, I and my fellow case managers are able to do significant work with the individuals and families we have today. With adequate funding, I would be able to give each person the time they need, living up to a vision we all share. Every person in this room would agree that the families I work with deserve every opportunity to live safe, healthy, and independent lives. Oregon laid out that vision with changes to the K Plan and now it's time we live up to our promise to Oregon families by fully funding the work that needs to be done.

Thank you for your time.

Mercedes Gutierrez, Case Manager
Multnomah County Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services

