

Friday, June 3rd, 2022

Chair Gelser Blouin and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery,

My name is Alice Miller and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of SEIU Local 503. SEIU represents more than 7,000 personal support workers (PSWs) who provide services to Oregonians through ODHS. Our members provide critical supports to families in their communities and are committed to helping build an Oregon where access to support is a top priority so that individuals with disabilities can thrive. Like many essential workers, our members continued to work throughout the pandemic to ensure families did not lose access to services.

For this reason, SEIU 503 is an important stakeholder in considering changes to Oregon's Developmental Disability Service delivery system. The members we represent include direct care providers in ODDS's Children's In-home Intensive Services program as well as Personal Support Workers in other settings throughout the state. Our interest is to avoid disruptions to the PSW workforce, support PSWs in their current roles, and make sure Oregon's direct care jobs are good quality jobs. Our members are committed to providing much needed respite and high-quality services to families.

As you have heard from parents, the availability of trained and qualified support workers is critical to the success of Oregon's ODHS programs and the health and safety of participants. Solving the direct care workforce crisis requires thoughtful investments in direct care professionals, including raising pay for this critical work, better recruitment, improved training quality and consistency, and developing career pathways for those who choose this important, difficult, and rewarding work. SEIU 503 is committed to this workforce and comes to the legislature every session to work with legislators on how to accomplish these goals.

In recent years, we have made progress toward achieving these goals. In 2019, the state began a process to give PSWs access to retirement through Oregon Saves. In 2021, we reached an agreement with the state to increase PSW base wages to \$17.77 by 2023, a \$2 raise; this same agreement also included a provision to ensure that PSWs participating in the CIIS program have access to Enhanced and Exceptional differentials in recognition of their work. PSWs also have access to the required 12 hours of training through a free, high-quality program offered through Carewell in seven languages and available online.

We know that our work is not over, and we agree that our state must do more to support families. Many parents of children with disabilities need financial support, respite, childcare, and more support to live and work in their communities, and these needs have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Oregon needs to find ways to meet these needs for all families, especially those families impacted by disabilities. We would like to be included in finding solutions to these complex problems. Our members deserve to be included in any decisions that impact the PSW workforce and we hope this committee can find ways to include broad stakeholders in these discussions, including individuals who experience IDD and their family members, as well as trusted advocacy organizations like DD Coalition and Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition (OSAC).

Thank you for considering this testimony,

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