

February 1, 2022

Chair Sara Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Art Robinson, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing as a member of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Oregon, Ashland where I serve as Branch Public Policy Chair. I express my strong support for Senate Bill 1556.

As the nation and our state's population ages, the need for qualified homecare workers and personal attendants is rapidly increasing. It is estimated that there will be a 36% increase in the demand for qualified caregivers in Oregon.

I am a healthy 74-year-old but eventually I will most likely need assistance to be able to remain in my home. My daughter will be responsible for finding a person to provide the best possible care for me. She will want to know that this person has met all the state requirements for homecare worker certification including background checks and verification of training. SB 1556 will allow the Department of Human Services to give her access to this crucial information by allowing her to access a Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Worker Registry. Access to the registry by the public including the workers themselves will improve transparency and safety.

There are additional benefits to SB 1556. Demand for all types of service workers is increasing. In order to compete for workers, the Healthcare Industry needs to attract and retain homecare workers and other caregivers. These challenging and low paying jobs that are estimated to be 81% women and 32% people of color are not perceived as requiring skilled labor. SB 1556 will lead to more competitive and consistent compensation for workers as their skills and training are acknowledged.

Being listed in the HCBS registry will also give caregivers' career mobility. Incentives give homecare workers reasons to invest in continued professional training and to build a career path for themselves in the Healthcare Industry. These pathway jobs include certified nursing assistants, licensed practical nurses and registered nurses which are all in high demand.

So far in my life I have required the services of homecare providers twice. Fifteen years ago when my elderly mother required homecare and again last year when my sister returned home from hospitalization for major surgery. In both cases, finding a qualified person was a challenge. Having a registry would have made my search much easier and my confidence in the qualifications of that person much higher. SB 1556 would have made my responsibility as my mother's and my sister's primary caregiver less stressful and would have assured my family members had the best possible care.

I urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 1556.

Respectfully,
Regina Ayars
Public Policy Chair

Ashland Branch, American Association of University Women of Oregon