

Good morning, Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and Members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Ashley Cesario. I live in Klamath Falls and I have been a homecare worker for 32 years. I support Senate Bill #1556 to create a certification and public registry for caregivers. I have taken care of other people since I was 15 years old and have never, ever been unable to find work because there is never a shortage of people who require collaboration to live with dignity. There is an infinite need that an entire economy can be built around. The concept is as close to non-partisan and universally supported as anything can be in these trying times. "Take proper care of the vulnerable." It isn't hard to accept but it is much harder to do.

The caregiver workforce is in crisis. For example, I have had only 18 days off in the last 2 years. Caregivers have quit in droves and even killed themselves from exhaustion in numbers never before recorded. We are in dire need of reinforcements. I support creating a certification process for home health workers because this job requires competency across an absolutely massive skill set. The State needs to take steps to make this job worth it; and that means a way to measure our worth and competency. Certification for homecare workers is a step in the right direction. Home Care work can be a lifelong passion or an excellent stepping stone to more focused medical professions. We work hard and have a lot of demonstrable skills. Our proof should be transferable as we move through life. That means a well maintained and user-friendly public registry so we can include verifiable data on our resumes and members of the public can be sure they are hiring a qualified caregiver.

Further, facilities should not be permitted to operate without properly trained staff and oversight. All employers should be required to demonstrate that their workers are getting the training they need to care for the most vulnerable Oregonians. Let's guarantee that our parents, folks living with special needs, favorite retired teacher and the fireman who save our house as a kid get a skilled and vetted caregiver no matter how they are getting it; whether in their home, assisted living or a full care facility. Remember, all of us will be there one day.

Solidifying the profession, increasing safety measures and enhancing accountability are the best ways to protect the community, grow our economy, provide more excellent jobs in a variety of fields and just be the great state I know we are. I passionately urge you to vote in favor of creating a certification and registry for home and facility-based caregivers. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue. Vote YES ON Senate Bill 1556.