



February 11, 2022

Co-chairs Girod and Holvey and esteemed committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in favor of this subcommittee allocating \$1,250,500 to support our Empowerment Center project.

For almost 50 years, lifempowered has been providing innovative supports to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Columbia County. In that time, we have prided ourselves on being forward thinking, mission driven and committed to those most vulnerable citizens from our community.

From the time we started; founded by a handful of parents in a basement of a church, who wanted more for their children, we have worked diligently to operate utilizing best practices not only in the services we provide but also as responsible stewards of public resources. We have been growing and innovating, working to fulfill our mission of supporting the people we serve to lead the lives *they* choose.

Over these last decades we have grown and evolved, moving from warehouse settings, large group living settings (up to 10 people in one home), to a focus on small settings (3 or fewer people living together), supporting people in their own homes, and providing only community-based services that are directed by the people who choose us. A key part of our success is our Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce. For us to continue to meet our mission and see our vision come to pass, a strong, healthy, skilled workforce is critical, as is being a valued and contributing part of our community. To date, the only part of lifempowered that hasn't moved forward with our mission is our building where we can meet, teach and provide administrative services.

Commented [KC1]: If you list what large group settings are then list what a small group setting is also

The building from which we operate is an antiquated and failing metal pole barn style structure that has been "updated" by adding on sections over the last 40 years to try and accommodate our ever growing and changing business. It is no longer an optimally functioning structure and sadly, is not even ADA compliant which means it is not fully accessible to the very people with IDD that we support. Accessibility is a critical component in providing the supports necessary for those who choose our services.

As part of a 5-year strategic planning process, we have been working with a consulting company to assess where we want to be in 5 years and our vision for the future. We refreshed our mission, vision, values and priorities and re-branded the organization. lifempowered envisions a county where all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have full access to their community and are viewed as valued and contributing members. Through a Covid informed feasibility study and insight included from the people we support, our DSP's, executive leadership, and our Board of Directors, it has led us to this funding request.

Our top priority is education both internal and external to our organization. Part of creating an opportunity for education includes a space to do so. As noted, our current building (which we have been operating from for more than 40 years) is woefully underwhelming. It is not secure, not disaster proof, not ADA compliant and chopped into many inefficient segments.

Through our positive feasibility study, it was determined to be more cost effective to build new than to try to upgrade the existing structure – if that were even possible. Our community strongly supports the effort for new 10,000 sq ft Empowerment Center at a cost of \$4.6M. We have been able to quantify support through individual gifts, private

foundations, community partners and ideally State of Oregon lottery bond funds. We have full property control of the current site we formerly leased from the Port of Columbia County to support this new center.

This Empowerment Center will complement our values and priorities in that it enables us to be a continued resource for the larger community by offering a large multi-use flex space, a teaching kitchen with hydraulic cabinets, ADA accessible restrooms and showers, a meditation/sensory room, and administrative office spaces. This entire center will be more than ADA compliant, it would be 100% accessible to anyone, regardless of level of ability. We are excited that this center will increase our ability to partner with other like-minded agencies who support a similar population, expanding the reach to more people with IDD than just those served directly by **lifempowered**.

Finally, as part of **lifempowered**'s emergency preparedness plan, a safe site to which we can evacuate in the event one or more of our homes are uninhabitable, is required. We currently have to coordinate with local hotels for that service – the Empowerment Center will be designed to meet that requirement. We have also entered discussions with the Columbia County Commissioners and Emergency Management Department to see how we may partner to provide overflow emergency/evacuation supports for the county. The development of our Empowerment Center will not only support our mission, but eventually the community at large.

Of course, our mission and the people we support are our first priority – and we feel that the proposed Empowerment Center meets that goal.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for lottery bond funds. We understand that resources are limited, and you have a tremendous responsibility to use them wisely. We believe that investing in this project is an excellent opportunity for Oregon to put their money toward a project that supports people, generates jobs, builds skills, and provides a safe shelter. It will also create a destination for people in and outside of our community who need meeting space – which drives revenue to local businesses. It is a win-win.

Respectfully,

Cindy Stockton, Executive Director