



Mar 29, 2024

To: Senate Interim Committee On Human Services: Chair Senator Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Senator Art Robinson and Members Senator James Manning Jr, Senator Flory Prozanski, and Senator Suzanne Weber

From: Joanne Fuhrman, Co-Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Partnerships in Community Living Inc, Legislative Chair for the Oregon Resource Association

Re: ODDS Leadership/Search Process

My name is Joanne Fuhrman, and I am the Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc. (PCL). PCL is a private, non-profit organization that has **partnered** with the State of Oregon for over 37 years. Currently PCL provides support to over 270 adults, children, and families at home, at work, and in their communities who live and thrive with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). Today, we support people who live in eight counties across the state, from the Willamette Valley to Southern Oregon. I am also the Legislative Chair of the Oregon Resource Association, so I am here representing almost 100 organizations like mine from across the state. Throughout my career working in close partnership with the Office of Developmental Disability Services (ODDS), I have worked with eight ODDS Directors/Interim Directors.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about what our community needs in a long-term ODDS Director and share ideas about creating an accessible, effective search process. In Oregon, we have a history of provider organizations partnering with ODDS to create innovative services for people with I/DD, overcoming obstacles like funding limitations, regulatory challenges, and resource shortages. We appreciate this history and embrace a similar approach in the future.

Oregon's service system is big and complicated. We are unique from most social services in that the services provided by our system can span a person's lifetime. We need a leader who is familiar with the system or someone who demonstrates an ability to grasp the complexities of Oregon's system quickly. The Oregon I/DD system has been challenged over the past decade with multiple directors and, of course, COVID-19. To bring stability to the community requires bringing leadership stability to the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services. We feel it is

important that this requires someone who has demonstrated knowledge and working in the field of I/DD.

As I mentioned, because we support people throughout their lifetime and in many different modes, the new Director also needs to be able to communicate with legislators to help them understand the complicated and diverse rate models and funding streams and how this constituency has been underfunded for decades.

We support Director Pakseresht's plan to provide Interim Director Dana Hittle with the time needed to stabilize ODDS. This approach is crucial for supporting collaboration and partnership and ensuring that the department focuses on supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to live the lives they choose. This will take time and is a vital step toward the success of any new Director.

We are looking for a visionary leader who understands the importance of supporting people with I/DD and their families to live in their communities and can shape the services to meet that need. Someone who will help the community shape the future of services with and for people with I/DD in Oregon and who is able to inspire others to reach that vision; someone who embraces innovative ideas as long as they best serve people. We need someone who truly embraces person-centered and directed services and understands the balance and impact that regulation can have on creating stable, creative, and individualized support. Ultimately, regulation is most powerful when it supports these outcomes; someone who knows how to negotiate with Medicaid to best serve Oregonians with I/DD, yet can still hold those with less than positive intentions to account.

The next ODDS leader must be committed to investing the time and effort that genuine collaboration entails. Stakeholder input is not a checkbox. Feedback is a continuous loop, not a one-way process. From the conception of an idea to its implementation, stakeholder input is essential and must be incorporated to shape rules, policies, and decisions to ensure quality outcomes. The leader we need will understand this and teach the ODDS team that this is time well spent. The fast way is not the best way.

We need a person who shares the values of supporting people with I/DD in the communities among their families and friends and can affect positive change. The ODDS Director must take time to know the people receiving services and see them as key stakeholders. They need to spend time listening to the self-advocate community and ensuring that ODDS decisions and actions set a framework to support people with I/DD to lead their preferred lives and thrive in their communities.

It is essential that the new Director possesses a strong set of values and is steadfast in upholding them when faced with challenges. This means always putting people with I/DD first and making decisions that foster positive, person-centered, and directed services. The Director must also be prepared to push back against efforts or obstacles that hinder progress toward better outcomes.

The I/DD community in Oregon is all about partnership and collaboration. We achieve great things when we listen to each other and work together. We achieve great things when we assume positive intent. We achieve great things when we trust each other and embrace each other's ideas. We need a leader who understands this and leads the community using an authentically collaborative approach.

In terms of process, while it is important to involve people from various parts of our community, it is also important that the process not be so protracted that it discourages applicants. We recommend that Director Pakseresht choose representative members from various stakeholder groups (i.e. self-advocates, family members, key provider associations, DD Coalition, Case Management Entities, etc.) If possible, there should not be multiple interview panels but one representative panel. Otherwise, applicants' responses become too rehearsed and diluted through repetition. This could be followed by a town hall-style interview with final candidates to gain a broader community perspective.

It is also important not to separate those making the ultimate hiring decision from other key stakeholders who are participating in the hiring process. Having an open, honest discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of each applicant with key decision makers is vital to finding a successful candidate.

Finally, we are concerned that the current pay for the position may not attract the type of applicant that Oregon needs. We recommend that the job be reevaluated and the pay scale adjusted based on similar competitive markets (i.e. other state Directors, Executive Directors of nonprofits, etc.).

On behalf of those we support and the ORA membership, thank you again for the opportunity to share our thoughts regarding the key characteristics of a new ODDS Director. We look forward to participating in the process.