

Submitter: John Munzer

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Measure: HB2457

As a Behavior Specialist working in a number of group homes that serve some of Oregon's most challenging children and adults who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities, I'm here to tell you that HB 2457 NEEDS to pass.

Because one way or another, the state of Oregon WILL pay for shelter and treatment for people who experience disabilities. We as a state don't have a choice about that. Our only choice is whether to pay for it in ways that are smart, ethical, and fiscally responsible... or in ways that are foolish, unethical, and FAR more expensive.

Currently, I'm seeing program after program get shut down, and the programs that remain unable to maintain basic health and safety, due to lack of staffing.

And the lack of staffing is due to the fact that staff cannot afford to live on what they're getting paid.

We ask a lot from our direct care staff. They have to be prepared at all times for medical emergencies, psychiatric emergencies, behavioral emergencies, and also prepared to prevent those emergencies to the greatest degree possible. They need the combined skillsets of a nurse, a teacher, a counselor, and a security guard... but we pay them far less than they could make in any of those jobs (or even what they could make driving a bus, working in a factory, or waiting tables). So... they take other jobs, because they can't pay rent by being told they're heroes and essential workers. They can only pay rent WITH MONEY, and we can't give them that. Because of this, we don't have nearly enough staff to do the job.

As a result, a number of group homes have closed.

High-behavior kids who should be in secure group homes are instead left with no options except the psychiatric hospital or juvenile detention.

Medically fragile adults who should be in medical group homes are left with no options except chronic emergency room visits.

The population most vulnerable to homelessness are losing one of the few options they have for being housed.

These folks aren't going to just disappear – they are going to cost the state far more money by going into crisis than they would have cost for the necessary housing and

staffing to keep them healthy and safe in the first place. Preventing crisis will not be cheap. But it's FAR cheaper than what the crisis will cost in increased demands on already overstretched hospitals, law enforcement, courts, correctional facilities, and other far more expensive options than group home care.

We NEED to significantly increase the wages of direct care workers.

It's the smart thing to do.

It's the ethical thing to do.

It's the fiscally responsible thing to do.

Vote "yes" on HB 2457.

- John M. Munzer, Behavior Specialist