

Submitter: Corey Jeppesen

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Measure: HB2457

I have worked in Oregon disability services since 1995. Staffing and funding have been leading issues in our industry during that entire span. I believe it is time for Oregon to finally stand up for its Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), just like they do for Oregonians with disabilities every day.

Funding levels for disability services have never been more problematic than they are at this moment. Legislatively-mandated funding rates have set DSP wages at just above minimum wage. Predictably, infrequent rate increases and oft-missed cost of living allowances have resulted in service providers struggling to hire and retain qualified staff, especially in positions requiring skilled, specialized care for medically fragile and behaviorally challenged people.

It grows increasingly difficult for providers to ensure that Oregonians with disabilities are safely and competently supported. Inflation, annual minimum wage hikes, and the labor shortage have all contributed to increased provider staff vacancy rates. In response, some providers have shuttered services rather than risk people's lives with inadequate staffing and support. Unlike other small businesses, service providers can't increase their prices and pass the profits to their employees. They depend entirely on the state to fund positions at wage levels that attract and retain staff.

HB 2457 would solve this problem, and not just for today. It mandates a fair wage for DSPs -- one equal to 150% of Oregon's minimum wage. This would immediately empower providers to attract and better compete for workers. Since Oregon's minimum wage is tied to inflation, it would also protect that ability in the future.

I urge you to vote yes for HB 2457.