

**To:** Representative Lisa Reynolds and members of the committee  
**From:** Joanne Fuhrman, Co-Director of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.  
**Date:** February 8, 2023  
**Subject:** **Please Support HB 2457 - Value the Work, Raise the Wage!**

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 35 years to provide support at home, work, and in our communities to over 270 adults, children, and families 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 90 organizations like mine from across the state.

PCL employs over 500 Direct Support Professionals – known as DSPs. DSPs are frontline workers and essential to meeting our mission of, “Expanding the horizons and enhancing the quality of life of those we support.”

The number of DSPs we employ used to be 35% higher, but we have been forced to shrink our services because we cannot find people to fill this vital role. For too long DSPs have been undervalued and underpaid. **PCL and other organizations like ours have no choice but to serve fewer people - even as the need for services continues to grow. This leaves vulnerable families with nowhere to turn.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to talk about HB 2457 and the importance of valuing the work of DSPs across Oregon and raising their average wage to 150% of minimum wage. In 2021, you made a significant investment in this crucial workforce and we were able to make real progress in moving DSP wages toward a livable wage. Now, we are asking you to protect your investment.**

**DSPs are much more than caregivers.** They provide support in all aspects of a person’s life. It is a complicated and challenging job. I started my career as a DSP. I know the joys and the struggles of this job. **This is not minimum wage work, yet despite PCL’s commitment to fair, competitive wages we are continually thrust into direct competition with fast food restaurants who start workers at \$17 to \$20 per hour.**

**We cannot compete, so we cannot find workers. Since we can’t find workers we are forced to reduce our capacity - a vicious cycle that is replicated across our state and leaving people with**

**IDD and their families from getting desperately needed support and, at times, staying in dangerous situations without the help of providers like us. You can reverse this trend by passing HB 2457.**

PCL, and organizations like ours, are state partners and depend on your funding and investment in the services we provide. We cannot simply raise our prices to increase wages - we rely on the funding you approve to provide these services. **Only you can impact this issue.**

Despite raising wages 38% since 2019, over the last few years we have reduced our workforce from 800 employees to under 600. We used to serve over 300 people, now we are only serving approximately 280 people. We currently have 140 positions open and are struggling to maintain our current, reduced capacity. This situation is not unique to PCL- sadly it is playing out at every organization across the state because this essential workforce is demanding a livable wage and funding just doesn't support that. **Providers are already paying above the reimbursement rate and as you can see it just isn't enough. We don't have any more to give. We need you to step up and help us ensure that people in need continue to have options for services.**

**There is no doubt that HB 2457 will have a direct, positive impact on this workforce and the quality of support people with IDD receive in Oregon.** Your previous investments in our services that go directly to wages immediately improved our ability to hire and retain this workforce. The gains are short lived, however, as minimum wage increases continue to push wages up, once again increasing competition and forcing us to lose ground. **The answer is HB 2457 - it not only raises wages now, but ensures that we maintain the edge over minimum wage jobs into the future.**

The workforce shortage has a devastating impact on organizations, families and most of all the people who rely on these services. It not only affects their quality of life, but their very health and safety. We must act together to reverse this trend and ensure that people with IDD are provided with the safety net of quality support they deserve.

Passing HB 2457 and investing in this workforce is not only the right thing to do, it is the only thing to do. The realities of undervaluing DSPs is playing out all around us, but it is not too late to turn this around. This bill will send a message that Oregonian's value our vulnerable citizens and those that provide the support they need to be active, valued members of their communities. It will allow us to create a career path for DSPs that will stabilize and grow this workforce. It will allow us once again to open our doors to serving more people in need.

Please support HB 2457.