

Submitter: Christine McNair

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Measure: HB2457

To the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services,

I'm writing to ask that you please support HB 2457.

My son was diagnosed with Autism 21 years ago at the age of 2. Prior to his diagnosis, I had a thriving career, and had earnings which exceeded that of my spouse. My son's Autism wasn't just the "quirky" or "superpower" kind. He had struggled for years with serious challenges and behaviors that led to calls from his school almost daily. During his childhood, I was forced to choose between my career or my availability to receive those calls and care for him when his behaviors prevented him from attending other programs. I chose to leave my career, but that was not without significant financial consequence to our family.

Fast forward to today, I'm once again the primary person caring for our son. Finding someone else who will show up consistently, stay for any meaningful length or time, and who has the skill needed to integrate him into the community is proving to be next to impossible, so this responsibility falls onto me. For now, I am happy to fill this need largely in part because the state is recognizing and valuing my contribution for what it is- a full time job which ultimately saves the state in medical bills, mental health care, and longer term residential care. The money I earn from providing an environment in which our son can interact in the community and enjoy the activities he loves to do allows me to contribute to the financial well-being of our family, and greatly reduces the life-long financial burden of caring for our son. I would like to begin building a team of caregivers to support him so that I can pursue a fulfilling career, give back to our community, and begin to put systems in place to care for him once we are no longer able to, but the constant revolving door of DSP's/PSW's is not only frustrating to manage, it's harmful to our son. We cannot subject him to the coming and going of caregivers who are not able to stay with the position for more than a few weeks. Consistency is key. These workers are skilled, and the job is challenging. They deserve to be paid a wage at which they are not constantly having to keep one foot out the door, looking for something else that will pay them enough to survive.

Increasing the wage for DSP's/PSW's will not only provide a living, professional wage for the caregivers (please note, this is a professional job), but it will allow families to put more consistent systems in place to keep their loved ones with disabilities in their homes and communities for a longer period of time, contributing to a better quality of life, a mentally and physically healthier child, and a stronger and more stable

economy in Oregon.

Please support HB 2457.

Sincerely,

Christine McNair