

Testimony in Support of HB-2457

Caitlyn Hohnstein 02/09/2023

My name is Caitlyn Hohnstein, and I am a Job Developer with the Pearl Buck Center. I have worked in the supported employment field for three years, and I am also a mother to a child with IDD. I am providing a testimony in support of the HB-2457 bill, which ensures that DSP's receive the wages that they deserve by moving DSP wages to 150% of the minimum wage and covers the Paid Leave Oregon Payroll Expense. The effects of this bill will allow the supports built during the Lane V. Brown Agreement (2015) to continue providing necessary services, reduce turn-over rates for DSP providers, and result in future success for all adults with IDD who rely on DSP supports.

The Lane V. Brown agreement (2015) challenged the state to take action and encourage equal opportunity employment for adults with IDD, instead of relying on sheltered and segregated settings with low wages. The state imposed stipulations in the settlement before they would agree to dismiss the case. Oregon was required to offer supported employment services and related employment services to people with intellectual/developmental disabilities that were employed in sheltered workshops or segregated settings. The terms of the agreement ensured that adults leaving segregated settings would have the opportunity to obtain competitive, integrated, and equal pay opportunity careers. The stipulations in the settlement agreement were specific, down to the timeline this was to be achieved by and the number of individuals that were required to be served and placed successfully in integrated settings. Due to Oregon's ability to not only meet, but exceed the stipulations and expectations outlined within the settlement, the Lane V. Brown case was dismissed in June of 2022. As a result, sheltered workshops, the continuation and allowance of segregated settings, and workplace discrimination against adult with IDD in Oregon were eliminated.

Supported Employment programs have emerged as Oregon's primary focus in assisting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to find competitive, integrated, and equal-opportunity work. Supported employment facilities provide valuable services including skill and personal assessments, skills training, preparation for interviews, aiding in job searches, applying to positions of interest, and initial support during the beginning of a new job. Supported employment also helps provide long-term support to ensure success by pin-pointing areas where reasonable accommodations are needed, removing barriers within supported individual's workplaces, promoting and building independence, fostering community relationships, and providing long-term on-the-job coaching as needed to ensure that adults with IDD are successful, trained, and skillful in their position.

In all DSP support positions, whether it be employment, home based, care settings, or life skills, the turn-over rate for IDD support professionals is high. DSP's enjoy their positions and are passionate about providing the support to assist someone with improving their lives, but cannot support themselves or their families with the salary that they are compensated. At the Pearl Buck Center, the average retention of Job Coaches does not go beyond the first year, and often times, we lose our new job coaches only a few months after they have started. When hiring new job coaches we provide training and resources that cost us. With the high turn-over rates, we lose a sufficient amount of money and have to start from the beginning again once they leave. The individuals we support often feel disheartened when the people that have been there for them, have to leave. With a recent study of data in our company, it was discovered that we have a 50% turn-over rate with Job Coaches within the first year of their employment with the common denominator being the low wages and high case-loads due to supported employment facilities being short-staffed.

If the HB-2457 bill was passed, it would lower our turn-over rate and DSP's in a position of support would be able to continue helping the population that requires assistance to grow and thrive in their life and establish independence. The people we support will have access to continued support and

guarantee future success in their lives, their personal growth. Developing necessary skills, and in their careers. Please vote yes on HB-2457. DSP's, the community of people that need our support, and their families are counting on your support!

References

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