

February 28th, 2023

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and Members of the Committee,

As you are aware, Oregon's Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) provides support to Oregonian's experiencing intellectual or developmental disabilities, or who have a hospital level of medical care needs. For far too long, children experiencing mental health challenges have been left with little to no support while facing limited access to treatment options with a severe lack of qualified professionals. Children with these diagnoses will continue to need access to out of home treatments, therapies, medications, and support. However, they will thrive best at home with a robust support plan and wraparound services.

I have two young children who currently receive Developmental Disability Services through a primary diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, one of them also has mental health diagnoses which greatly affect her everyday life. I am incredibly grateful that she has been able to access Developmental Disability services which have been instrumental in providing her the support she needs to thrive at home. She has access to the Oregon Health Plan which allows us to access and afford a qualified therapist and psychologist. She receives attendant care services (currently provided by her father due to the Public Health Emergency) which provides a trained, reliable, and consistent adult to assist her with activities of daily living. She has access to a free Behavioral Technician who helped us write a Positive Behavioral Support Plan to be implemented by members of the community who may work with her. She has been able to purchase a crash pad, sensory light, and weighted blankets. We have access to safety accommodations such as alarms for doors and windows and special needs car seats. Her Service Coordinator has assisted me with resources and handling insurance issues. None of these things would be accessible to her without the Autism diagnosis, even though her primary support needs reside in the mental health realm.

Senate Bill 820 will be instrumental in assisting children like mine with their mental health support needs at home. My hope is that it will also expand the support needs of other children receiving Developmental Disability Supports. I have been told by our Service Coordinator that ODDS is not set up to provide mental health support and therefore services such as attendant care are not meant to provide assistance for tasks such as anxiety support to access grocery stores or doctors appointments. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 820 supporting children experiencing mental health support needs. It is time Oregon proves that these children are valuable, loved, and cherished members of our communities and that their needs are no less than any other child facing challenges. We need to support them and their families if we want to see change and a stronger future.

Thank you for your time and dedication to Oregon's most vulnerable children,
Jessa R.