

Oregon Resource Association

2405 Front St. NE, Suite 150 | Salem, OR 97301
(503) 585-3337 | oregonresource.org



To: Sen. Wlinsvey Campos, Co-Chair Rep. Andrea Valderrama, Co-Chair and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
From: Lois Gibson, Oregon Resource Association
Date: March 2, 2023
Subject: **Please Support HB 5026 - Prioritize DSP Wages in IDD Budget!**

My name is Lois Gibson and I am the Executive Director of Oregon Resource Association (ORA). We are a membership association that supports, advocates and collaborates with almost 90 organizations across Oregon that provide services to people with intellectual, developmental (IDD) and other disabilities. These organizations employ thousands of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), the frontline workers who provide direct support to people who receive these services.

I am writing to ask that you **protect your previous investment and continue to fully fund IDD Services the budget**. In addition, I am asking that you prioritize additional **funding to support increases in Direct Support Professional wages**. Previous investment allowed us to increase this crucial workforce's wages by 1.25 an hour (current average reimbursement wage for DSPs at \$17.81), yet provider agencies still struggle to recruit and retain the DSPs needed to perform this vital work.

Being a Direct Support Professional is a complex job. It means helping people manage complicated health conditions and challenging behaviors; helping people access their communities and communicate with others; supporting people with intimate personal care and daily tasks like bathing, dressing, and eating as well as entertainment and relationships. In short, it means helping people in all aspects of their lives and being called on to make life and death decisions. **It is definitely not minimum wage work.**

I ask that you support HB 2457 which outlines the funding needed to move this workforce forward. This bill moves the average wage for Direct Support Professionals across our state to 150% of the Portland Metro Minimum wage. It also covers both the employer and employee cost of Paid Leave Oregon. In 2021, the Oregon legislature approved full funding of the IDD services rate models and service providers were able to make significant progress toward paying DSPs a living wage. Sadly, this was quickly eroded by inflation and steeply rising wages across all industries.

I have been doing this work for over 30 years and I started as a Direct Support Professional. I love this community and I am so proud of the incredible work our members do. **Unfortunately, the pandemic and other factors have strained our member organizations to the breaking point.** I have watched organization after organization close services across the state, shrinking capacity at a time when need for these services continues to grow. I frequently speak with families who are struggling to find a competent provider for their son or daughter. **Without your help this situation will only get worse.**

ORA's member organizations cannot simply raise their prices to cover these increased costs. As state partners they rely on you to approve funding for these services. The current level of funding is based on cost studies that are years old. Providers are already paying DSP wages above the reimbursement rate, yet wages have still fallen behind market. Providers now compete with jobs like fast food that used to be considered minimum wage positions, and they are losing in this competition.

We need your support to change this trajectory. **We need HB 2457 to bump up DSP wages and to take these services into the future.** I know you face a number of competing priorities but if we cannot support our most vulnerable families what will that say about Oregon?

Supporting this bill also moves forward Oregon's efforts toward improved diversity, equity and inclusion in employment. **Per National Core Indicator data (2020) this workforce is primarily female (71%) and 44.8% come from BIPOC communities.**

Passing HB 2457 will result in an immediate, positive impact on these communities. We saw your previous investment quickly reduce both staff vacancy and turnover numbers. People with disabilities and their families began to have a workforce they could rely on. Unfortunately, this was short lived as rising wages and inflation quickly outpaced these gains. That is why **the long-term answer is HB 2457.** It will create stability in this workforce and allow our members to continue to provide this growing community with the quality services they deserve.

Please support IDD full funding in HB 5026 and prioritize increasing DSP wages in the budget by supporting HB 2457.