



*a nonprofit organization assisting persons
with developmental disabilities
in the community*

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March 2, 2023

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services,

My name is Anna Keenan-Mudrick, and I am the Executive Director of Community Access Services (CAS), a Nonprofit Medicaid Provider Agency serving Oregonians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in Wasco, Hood River, Columbia, Washington, Clackamas and Multnomah Counties. I am also the sibling of a gentleman who experiences autism. I started out in this field of work 30 years ago, fresh out of college, as a Direct Support Professional, and absolutely fell in love with this profession!

I am submitting this written testimony to ask that you prioritize Oregonians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and their incredible workforce by supporting full funding of IDD services in HB 5026. I also seek your full support of HB 2457, which would allow us to pay our workforce as the professionals that they are, at an average of 150% of minimum wage.

The work that we do is massively fulfilling! But it is not easy, and has become increasingly more difficult as the workforce shortage has grown in the last handful of years, most dramatically in the wake of what we hope has been the worst of the COVID pandemic. We are monumentally grateful to our Oregon legislators for your commitment to us last full session of fully funding our new rate model.

But given the vast changes in the wage market since its development the health and safety of Oregonians with IDD, and the livelihood of their phenomenal, also historically, wrongly marginalized Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), the wage assumptions currently utilized are based on the average wage assumed at the time of its development, around four years ago and pre-pandemic, of \$17.81 an hour. You can clearly see that in today's wage market, that figure puts those we serve in a very dangerous situation. If we cannot recruit or retain a solid professional workforce, our remaining DSPs will be even further overstretched, exhausted...which will lead to additional turnover, further risking the health and welfare of those we support who are already more medically and socially vulnerable.

We are currently in a position of having to stretch our budgets in ways that, if sustained or increased, risk our fiscal viability, as we are reimbursed in our rate model based on an average DSP wage of \$17.81/hour, but are paying an average DSP wage at CAS of \$19.91/hour, which is still not enough, particularly with another significant minimum wage increase anticipated July 1st.

We have had to turn down numerous new referrals due to lack of enough workforce capacity, and have seen many other providers having to give notice on programs and services. In several cases in the past three years we have jumped in to take many of these at-risk programs on, to try to help stave off crisis we are seeing, including our absorption of another nonprofit entirely, who was bleeding massively. We have not been able to do this in most cases obviously, and frankly cannot afford to continue doing so from a financial or overall bandwidth standpoint as it is exhausting. And those we serve here in Oregon should not be put at such massive risk. Without enough DSPs and provider agencies, more Oregonians with IDD will be isolated, neglected, homeless, and will become more psychologically and medically compromised.

By passing HB 2457 our professional workforce will be stabilized and sustained now, and into the future, as 150% of minimum wage being codified in this manner will then allow for adjustment each time our state calculates the needed changes statewide for the low end required for starting wages in many positions.



And given the complexity of the Direct Support Professional job, with duties ranging from communication and behavior support, to assistance with budgeting and bill paying, to medication administration and medical care management, to support in keeping a job, to aid in ambulation and tube feeding, to accessing and maintaining housing...it recognizes and ensures a fair, appropriate and professional level wage.

Thank you so much for your support in moving this significant and life-saving legislation forward!

Most Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "A. Keenan-Mudrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anna Keenan-Mudrick, MSW
Executive Director