

Submitter: Laura Dahill
On Behalf Of: SB1016 HB2457
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

Thank you for hosting Town Hall Meetings to hear from constituents around the state. My name is Laura Dahill, and I live in Eugene. I am the proud parent of twin boys, who are currently seniors in high school.

Fourteen years ago, one of my sons was diagnosed with autism. At the time, I wondered if my son would be able to read, if he would ever speak, if he would be potty trained, and if we would ever be independent. I remember distinctly wanting to flee to a deserted island so I could protect my son. In two and half short weeks, my son will turn 18. Today, he can speak and read, he is able to use the bathroom independently, and he has big dreams for his future.

I attribute my son's success to his own sheer determination, and the support and services we have received.

My son has benefited greatly from direct support professionals (DSPs) who have helped him learn, grow and gain skills. But with the workforce challenges we are experiencing today, it is not easy for families to find DSPs, especially when DSPs cannot earn a livable wage. I would like to ask the Ways & Means Committee to support HB 2457, which will raise the DSP wage and value the work of this critical workforce.

My family would also not be where we are today without the incredible support we received from our regional family network, which is called Families Connected. Families Connected provided a lifeline that literally saved me from self-isolation. Having the support of other parents traveling on a similar journey has helped me to look beyond my son's diagnosis and see his strengths and gifts. We are capitalizing on his strengths to plan for a positive future. On June 10, my son will receive his high school diploma and then he wants to start his own business. Families Connected helped us realize these big dreams. I urge this committee to also support SB 1016, which will formally put the regional family networks into the developmental disabilities' infrastructure.

As you plan the budget for the next biennium, please prioritize the needs of the disability community. People with disabilities have been marginalized for far too long, and they deserve to be included in their communities, and seen as valued, respected, and contributing Oregon citizens.

Thank you for your consideration and the important work you do.

Laura Dahill