lifempowered

Co-chairs Senator Girod and Representative Holvey and esteemed Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in favor of this subcommittee allocating $1,250,500 to support our Empowerment Center project.

For almost 50 years, **life**mpowered has been providing innovative supports to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Columbia County. In that time, we have prided ourselves on being forward thinking, mission driven and committed to those most vulnerable citizens from our community.

Over these last decades we have been growing and innovating, working to fulfill our mission of supporting the people we serve to lead the lives *they* choose. We have grown and evolved, moving from warehouse settings, large group living settings (up to 10 people in one home), to a focus on small settings, supporting people in their own homes, and providing only community-based services that are directed by the people who choose us. A key part of our success is our Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce. For us to continue to meet our mission and see our vision come to pass, a strong, healthy, skilled workforce is critical, as is being a valued and contributing part of our community.   To date, the only part of **life**mpowered that hasn't moved forward with our mission is our operations building where we can meet, teach and provide administrative services.

As part of a 5-year strategic planning process, we refreshed our mission, vision, values and priorities and re-branded the organization. **life**mpowered envisions a county where all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have full access to their community and are viewed as valued and contributing members. Through a Covid informed feasibility study and insight included from the people we support, our DSP's, executive leadership, and our Board of Directors, it has led us to this funding request.

Our community strongly supports the effort for the new 10,000 sq ft Empowerment Center at a cost of $4.7M. In 2022 we were granted a $500,000 Federal Appropriations award for planning the new facility. In addition to this State of Oregon allocation under consideration, we have a pending $1.5M Federal Appropriations request for construction. We have been able to quantify community support through individual gifts, private foundations, community partners to leverage the potential public support.

This Empowerment Center will complement our values and priorities in that it enables us to be a continued resource for the larger community by offering a large multi-use flex space, a teaching kitchen with hydraulic cabinets, ADA accessible restrooms and showers, a meditation/sensory room, and administrative office spaces. This entire center will be more than ADA compliant, it would be 100% accessible to anyone, regardless of level of ability. We are excited that this center will increases our ability to partner with other like-minded agencies who support a similar population, expanding the reach to more people with IDD than just those served directly by **life**mpowered.

Finally, as part of **life**mpowered's emergency preparedness plan, a safe site to which we can evacuate in the event one or more of our residential homes are uninhabitable, is required. We currently have to coordinate with local hotels for that service – the new Empowerment Center will be designed to meet that requirement. We have also entered discussions with the Columbia County Commissioners and Emergency Management Department to see how we may partner to provide overflow emergency/evacuation supports for the county.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for funding from the State of Oregon. We understand that resources are limited, and you have a tremendous responsibility to use them wisely. We believe that investing in this project is an excellent opportunity for Oregon to put their money toward a project that supports people, generates jobs, builds skills, and provides a safe shelter. It is a win-win.

Respectfully,

Cindy Stockton
Executive Director