

Tawnia Cotton, CESP

PO Box 302

Rogue River, OR 97537

Tawnia@livingopps.org

5415311085

March 18, 20205

TO: Joint Ways and Means Committee

Subject: Urgent Need for Higher Wages for Direct Support Professionals

I am writing to you as a dedicated Direct Support Professional (DSP) who loves my job and the individuals I support. Every day, I help people with disabilities live fulfilling, independent lives in their communities. It is meaningful work, but despite my passion and commitment, I struggle to make ends meet.

I currently commute from another city 25 miles away which is 50 miles round trip per day. Gas is very expensive, so I donate Plasma twice a week to be able to put gas in my car to be able to get to and from work. Due to the high cost of House Payments, I also had to start doing Uber to make ends meet in order to make it.

The current wages for DSPs are simply not enough to cover basic living expenses. Many of us work long hours, take on second jobs, or rely on public assistance just to survive. This is not sustainable, and it is leading to high turnover in a field that requires consistency and trust between staff and the people we serve.

Without competitive wages, we risk losing skilled and compassionate DSPs, which directly impacts the quality of care for people with disabilities. I urge you to prioritize increased funding for DSP wages in the upcoming budget. Investing in us means investing in the well-being of thousands of individuals who rely on our support every day.

Please stand with us and take action to ensure that DSPs receive a livable wage. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further and share firsthand the challenges we face.

Thank you for your time and commitment to supporting our essential work.

Sincerely,

Tawnia Cotton, Job Coach

Certified Employment Specialist Professional