

Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Josh Bearman; I am the executive director for TVW Inc., a local nonprofit that has been supporting people with disabilities with employment services for 58 years in Oregon. We help people discover their passions and achieve independence through meaningful work. I am here in support of funding the IDD budget, which includes necessary investments in our workforce.

For many years, our agency and others have come to the Capitol, met with legislators individually, shared stories, and discussed the severe funding shortages for disability services in Oregon.

This shortfall in funding is directly linked to the challenge of finding and retaining the workforce that provides these services. We are reaching a crisis point at a time when more people are waiting for services than ever, and the number of people with disabilities in Oregon will only increase in the future. If the DSP (Direct Support Professional) workforce continues to struggle, people will lose access to the necessary supports that help them gain employment, achieve independence, and live full and regular lives. This is a freedom that all too many people without disabilities take for granted each day.

Thanks to the DHS Wage & Rate study conducted at the legislature's request, we now know that **\$558 million is needed** to fund IDD services—the first time we have a concrete amount showing the actual size of the funding gap. We have operated at this gap for years, resulting in a lack of new hires that would enable our agency to provide more needed services. It is also the number one reason for turnover; people want to be able to buy a car and afford a place to live, not choose between the two. For DSPs with families and children, the rate disparity cuts even more profound. Please incorporate a cost-of-living increase so DSPs and their families can plan for the future and remain in jobs they love, assisting people with disabilities.

I am asking you to prioritize this shortfall now, as failing to do so will result in Oregonians with disabilities and the hard-working Direct support professional workforce falling through the cracks yet again, at a time when I am unsure we can move forward without this support.

The answer is direct, I will not call it simple, but it is direct. Fund the IDD budget at the rates provided by the rate study and work toward a cost-of-living increase tied to this necessary work and workforce. Please do this before it's too late. Let's stop making the same mistake over and over; we don't need tragedy to recognize the need. The rate study shows the need. Please act now.

Sincerely,
Josh Bearman
Executive Director
TVW Inc.