

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Sanchez, and members of the committee,
For the record, my name is Chrissy Cliburn and I am the Program Manager for Linn County Developmental Disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I appreciate the chance to address the critical issue of funding for developmental disability (DD) services, and I look forward to sharing my insights on the importance of adequately funding this vital program.

I have dedicated almost 20 years to this field, and over the course of my career, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that underfunding DD services has on both individuals and communities.

One of the core responsibilities of my organization is to provide case management services to individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). For these individuals, case managers are truly a lifeline. We connect people to essential services such as housing, healthcare, and transportation. In the event of an emergency, Case Managers are also the ones who ensure individuals can evacuate and find a safe place. Case Managers are also tasked with an expanding array of complex responsibilities, including ensuring health and safety, monitoring services both at home and in the community, following up on protective service allegations, coordinating housing support, assisting with Medicaid and Social Security processes, facilitating transitions from institutional settings like jails and hospitals, and managing complex medical and behavioral care needs.

Unfortunately, our programs are currently funded through the Oregon Department of Human Services at a level that remains flat, year after year, at approximately 86% of what would be considered full funding. This chronic underfunding is having a significant negative impact. We are experiencing increased staff burnout, turnover, and higher workloads, which directly affects the quality of the services we provide.

In the past three years, since I've been in my current position, we've had to onboard 24 new employees, which represents over 50% turnover. This high turnover rate is largely due to staff stress and burnout. As we lose employees, the remaining staff bear the added burden of managing higher workloads. This creates a vicious cycle: the more employees we lose, the more stress the remaining staff experience, leading to further turnover.

This situation has cascading effects on the individuals and families we serve. It takes time to learn about someone's strengths, weaknesses, goals, and fears. The more we know about the people we serve, the better we can connect them to the right services and support. When individuals receive the appropriate support, they spend less time in emergency rooms, jails, or mental health crises. They are also able to increase their independence, productivity, and integration within their communities.

People with I/DD need to feel comfortable sharing intimate details of their lives with their case managers. When turnover is high due to underfunding, it becomes difficult to maintain these relationships. For example, one individual may not feel comfortable disclosing an issue, like experiencing constipation, to a new case manager because there is no established trust. This could lead to a serious medical issue, like an impaction that requires hospitalization, which could have been avoided if the individual felt comfortable reaching out earlier.

Moreover, our staff are working with some of the most vulnerable populations in our state. The combination of heavy responsibility, a complex service system, and wages that have not kept pace with the increasing demand on staff leads to a high rate of turnover. This, in turn, impacts the quality of care and services that individuals with I/DD receive.

To address these issues, we are partnering with the Brokerages this session to advocate for restoring these programs to 100% of full funding. This investment would not only reduce staff turnover but also draw down significant federal matching funds. This will help alleviate many of the staffing issues and improve the quality of services across the state.

I urge you to support this request and invest in the future of individuals with developmental disabilities and the dedicated professionals who serve them. The success of this program depends on your support for adequate funding. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chrissy Cliburn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chrissy Cliburn, Program Manager

Linn County Developmental Disabilities