

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Starr, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Patty Falkenstein and I am a personal support worker in Tigard. I am also the parent of an adult daughter with Down syndrome.

I see this system from both sides every day, as a worker and as a parent. And from both sides, I can tell you it needs to change.

My daughter gets services from a great DD agency during the day, and I am grateful for that. But not everyone is so lucky. I talk to PSWs who also work as direct support professionals, and what they tell me is troubling. Some agencies hire workers and then leave them on their own with no real supervision, even though the rate model assumes quality supervision is being provided. That is one more area where some employers may be padding their profits.

And that is really the point. We do not fully know all the ways providers are taking advantage of this system. But we know there is no accountability and no transparency. A workforce standards board could examine these industry factors, start making meaningful improvements, and make sure that state dollars, which are hard to come by in these uncertain times, go to quality services and quality jobs.

As a PSW, I am proud of the work our union has done over the years to raise wages and improve conditions for personal support workers. But the way the Legislature has funded DD services has been destabilizing. Money goes into the system without any rules about how providers spend it. During legislative days, you heard about agencies coaching their workers to keep enough hours as a PSW to maintain access to the state health plan so the agency does not have to cover the cost. That is gaming the system, and it is another example of rate model assumptions being exploited. But agencies are here to tell you to simply raise their rates and they will raise wages and benefits out of the goodness of their hearts.

I am honestly surprised by the level of opposition to this bill. It is about setting minimum enforceable standards. That is it. The fear is overblown and I do not understand the resistance to making sure everyone gets a basic level of quality and workers have a voice.

I know there are great DD providers in this state, many of them legacy nonprofits who do right by their workers and clients. This bill is not aimed at them. It raises the floor so that low quality providers have to meet the standards the good ones are already setting. It levels the playing field for high road employers who are losing workers to big for profit agencies that undercut them by skimping on benefits and support for their clients.

This bill brings workers, people who themselves rely on services, provider agencies, and the state together to set real standards. My daughter deserves stable support from workers who are well trained and fairly paid. I am asking you to vote yes on SB 1505. Thank you.