

Submitter: Aster Nickerson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1505

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Starr, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of SB 1505.

My name is Aster Nickerson, and I'm a direct support professional working in a group home in Gresham. I started this work because a neighbor recommended it to me, and it felt like a good fit. In college, I worked at housing and helped people find stable places to live, and I've always cared about supporting people in my community.

I started working in group homes in June of last year. I've worked in multiple homes, covering shifts wherever I'm needed. I work with kids with intellectual and developmental disabilities, at this point I mostly work with high schoolers.

I love this work. I'm deeply committed to the people I support, and I care about making sure their needs are met. But the way the system works right now makes that incredibly hard.

Short staffing is constant. I'm often sent from one house to another just to cover shifts. That makes it almost impossible to do long-term planning with clients or provide consistent care. For people with developmental disabilities, especially children, that kind of inconsistency can be really destabilizing.

Clients often ask me if I'll be working the next day. They want to know who will be there for them. Many times, I can't even answer that question, because my schedule changes with very little notice due to staffing shortages.

Short staffing also affects worker safety. I was injured by a client a few weeks ago. There have been situations where workers were hurt on the job and didn't get medical care right away, not because they didn't need it, but because there was no one available to cover their shift.

In my case, I didn't go to the hospital right away because there was no one to cover my shift that night or the next morning. That shouldn't happen in a system that's supposed to support both workers and the people we care for.

I helped organize my workplace and form a union because workers need a voice. We are currently working toward our first contract, which is one way to improve conditions. But most group home workers don't have a union and don't have a real way to be heard.

Workers know what needs to change. We know that better staffing, better training, better wages, and more stability would immediately improve care. But under the current system, workers don't have a seat at the table.

A workforce standards board matters because it creates that voice, not just for one workplace, but across the entire system. It's a way to fix what's broken so workers can stay and clients can thrive.

I want to keep doing this work, and the people I support deserve consistent, stable care. I'm asking you to move this bill forward so we can start fixing the system for

workers, for families, and for the people who depend on us every day.