

Submitter: Calli Ross
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workforce
Development
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1518

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Calli Ross and I am writing in strong support of SB 1518.

I come to this conversation not only as an advocate, but as a parent caregiver to a child with complex medical and developmental disabilities, and as someone who works daily with families across Oregon navigating our home- and community-based services system. From that perspective, I want to speak directly to the caregiver shortage and the urgent need to preserve and strengthen what is increasingly a caregiver-led economy in our state.

Oregon's disability and aging services systems do not function without caregivers. They are not an "extra" or a convenience — they are the infrastructure that allows children to remain in their homes, adults with disabilities to live in their communities, and seniors to age with dignity. Yet we continue to treat this workforce as if it is optional or endlessly replaceable. It is neither.

Across Oregon, families are already in crisis. Agencies are understaffed, shifts go unfilled, and parents routinely leave the traditional workforce because they cannot secure safe, reliable support for their children. When that happens, the state does not save money — it shifts costs into hospitals, institutional placements, emergency services, and long-term care systems that are exponentially more expensive. The caregiver shortage is not theoretical; it is visible every single day in delayed discharges, missed therapies, and families on the brink of burnout.

SB 1518 matters because it recognizes that care work is real work and that stability for caregivers is stability for the entire support system. When we protect wages and basic financial safeguards for caregivers, we are not creating special treatment — we are maintaining the minimum conditions necessary for this workforce to exist at all.

Oregon already operates within a caregiver-led economy whether we name it that or not. Tens of thousands of hours of medically necessary, behaviorally complex, and emotionally demanding labor are being provided by parents, relatives, and direct support workers. These individuals are preventing institutionalization, reducing Medicaid expenditures, and sustaining community integration. If this workforce collapses, there is no reserve bench waiting to step in. There is only higher cost and poorer outcomes.

Maintaining a caregiver-led economy is not about shifting responsibility onto families — it is about acknowledging the economic reality that caregivers are already carrying the system and ensuring that policy does not further destabilize them. Protections like those addressed in SB 1518 help prevent attrition, encourage retention, and signal that Oregon values the people who keep vulnerable residents safe and supported.

We often talk about innovation in healthcare and human services. The most effective innovation we have already discovered is this: people thrive best in their homes and communities, supported by consistent caregivers who know them well. That model only works if caregivers themselves can survive financially and emotionally within the system.

Supporting SB 1518 is not just a labor decision. It is a healthcare decision, an education decision, a disability rights decision, and a fiscal responsibility decision. It is an investment in the workforce that quietly prevents larger, more expensive crises every day.

Thank you for your time and for recognizing the essential role caregivers play in Oregon's present and future.