

Chairs Nosse and Beyer, members of the committee,

For the record my name is Pennie Hartley, and I am an SEIU 503 member. I work in Portland Oregon for Vocational Rehabilitation. I love my job, and I have done this work for over 13 years because we don't give handouts, we give a hand up. We are able to change lives by teaching people the skills they need to help them get and keep a job.

I work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, most receive Social Security benefits and without our services, they would not be able to get a job and more importantly be able to keep a job without the resources and support our agency provides. I recently worked with a young girl who was in the Community Transition Program after she received a modified diploma. She experiences intellectual impairment and she lacked confidence. She really wanted to work with children but she was not able to pass a CPR/First Aid class. However, I contracted a job developer to help customize a job working in a child care center. She helps with snacks and does most of the cleaning at the center. You would not even know this is the same shy girl now that she has been working. She lives in a family where her parents and siblings also have intellectual impairment and she is THEIR inspiration because she has a job! She helps children who also have similar disabilities by sharing her story and giving them hope that some day they can work and be self-sufficient too! You can't put a price tag on that!

We are very understaffed not just in our office but across the State of Oregon. People have to wait for many months just to get an initial intake appointment. Counselors like myself are so over worked just trying to keep up with the workload. We have lost so many good counselors and staff because they often leave for jobs in the private sector that offer more money and less stress. We need more good counselors and higher salaries to provide more incentive to work in public service.

I have another client that needs significant costly services to improve the quality of his life and allow him the opportunity to communicate and move his body independently. Right now he has to have care providers to do everything for him, including feeding him, moving him and "guessing" what he needs. If we had more funding and smaller caseloads, my vision would be to purchase the technology he needs that Medicaid won't pay for so he can eventually be more independent with moving himself around and communicating with others with an electric wheel chair specially designed with switches he could push with his neck that would operate his wheel chair. These same switches would allow him to communicate for the first time with his mother and family. His dream is to work using his wheel chair to bring goods and services to people. This technology is very expensive and it takes so much time as a counselor to navigate bureaucratic systems to provide comprehensive and complex services to people with significant needs. If we had the funding our director requested I could make this happen for this young man!

Thank you for your time, and for your commitment to this issue.

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