

Chair Barker
Members of House Business Committee

RE: Support for SB 494 A

Chair Barker and Members of the Committee, for the record my name is Josh Bearman. I am the Executive Director at TVW Inc. We are a nonprofit agency in Oregon with a 50-year history serving people in Oregon living with and working with Disabilities. We are a QRF or (Qualified Rehabilitation Facility) that operates an employment division called Sustainable Cleaning Systems to provide employment opportunities for individuals with and without disabilities.

The QRF program started over 40 years ago, in 1977 and has provided employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities ever since. In the Program's early years, QRFs mostly served people with developmental disabilities and those with access to ongoing Medicaid funding for employment services. However, that is starting to change.

Employees who work at Sustainable Cleaning Systems of TVW Inc. make minimum wage or above, have opportunities for advancement, and work with supervisors and admin staff who care about their employment goals. The majority of the people in our program do not have access to long term employment funding. What this often means is that after 90 days of successful employment, a person reaches the completion of services through Vocational Rehabilitation. This can present problems for people who live with mental health illnesses, traumatic brain injury or other disabilities that do not qualify for long term funding yet face continued challenges to stable employment.

Our QRF program focuses on providing an opportunity for advancement while at the same time providing accommodations. This is all done without any support funding; our program is fully funded through the cleaning contracts under which our employees work. These contracts are typical of the greater cleaning industry and are done in the night, day and on weekends. Our employees work together with people of all abilities, both with and without disabilities. They regularly interact with and form relationships with our customers.

On multiple occasions, our employees have left us to work for a customer with an open position, all based on the relationships they made while working there. Employees gain additional confidence, experience, and connections, and routinely move onto other career paths. We see these as a strong indicator of the value our program brings.

In the last two decades the QRF program) has evolved to serve all people with disabilities, a large majority of whom don't have access to long term Medicaid funding. Of the 3300 Oregonians working for QRF organizations, over two-thirds do not have access to Medicaid funding for employment supports, but still need significant assistance beyond what an employer would typically provide.

Although 40 years ago people with disabilities were usually employed in congregated workplaces, expectations have since changed. People today expect to work in their communities beside and with people who may or may not have disabilities. Lowering the direct labor percentage promotes further inclusion and moves the line forward for people working in the QRF Program. Without this flexibility,

people who don't have access to long-term funding would lose a valuable employment resource. An integrated work environment is essential to giving people the confidence and training to advance in their careers.

There is a misconception that a reduction in labor ratio percentage will result in fewer jobs for people with disabilities. On the contrary, the ratio change is to further inclusion opportunities for workers in the program, which will lead to more opportunities for people moving forward. The ratio change is for broader inclusion but does not prevent a QRF certified agency from employing individuals at a 75, 85, or even 90 % ratio. The idea that people will lose jobs based on the ratio is just not accurate. We are trying to move the bar in Oregon, setting a better example for such programs all across the country.

TVW works with individuals who have experienced job loss over and over again that coincides with homelessness, substance dependence, and other challenges that a steady, ongoing job can help address. When a person faces barriers to employment due to his or her disability but can't access long-term funding, job loss can mean also losing health and home. For quite some time, the QRF program has been evolving to serve this need in Oregon. SB 494 mirrors this evolution and helps point toward a future where all Oregonians have access - in their community - to meaningful, sustainable jobs that pay a living wage. As of September 2018, more than 75 percent of the people employed in the program were already making minimum wage or above. Those numbers are still increasing, and we are excited to bring that number to 100 percent with your support of SB 494.

The changes made to the QRF program by SB 494 are essential to ensuring that it continues to support the employment goals of people with disabilities - both tomorrow and for another 40 years. As the world of work changes, so do expectations of and for people with disabilities. SB 494 reshapes the QRF Program and related laws, updating key elements of the program to meet those expectations. I urge your support for SB 494.

Thank you for your time and interest in hearing from our organization. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Josh Bearman

TVW Inc.

Operating as: Sustainable Cleaning Systems