

Oregon State Legislature

House Committee on Human Services

Submitted online: <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Testimony/HHS>

10 March 2021

**RE: Public Comments of Bethesda Lutheran Communities Concerning OR HB2964**

On behalf of Bethesda Lutheran Communities, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Oregon HB2964, a desperately need initiative that would require the Oregon Department of Human Services to set intellectual and developmental disability (ID/DD) reimbursements rates at a level sufficient to pay direct support professionals (DSPs) 150 percent of the minimum wage for the Portland Metro region. **Bethesda Lutheran Communities enthusiastically supports HB2964 as written.**

Simply put, the Oregon ID/DD service system is in crisis. As essential frontline workers, DSPs have been a lifesaving resource for people with disabilities during the COVID19 pandemic. But, even before the pandemic ID/DD service providers were facing severe worker shortages and dire hiring outlooks. It is extremely challenging to recruit and hire DSPs with the expertise and qualifications necessary to provide high-quality disability supports for people with significant medical and behavioral needs. And, with an average starting wage of \$13.12, most potential DSPs can find much less challenging employment with higher starting wages at other businesses. This results in chronic staffing shortages and high turnover rates.

Turnover rates for staff in disability long-term services and services remains around 45 percent. And, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) predicts that employment for personal care aides will grow by 26 percent between 2014 and 2024, and by 38 percent for home health aides, two categories which encompass frontline DSPs. This contrasts to a national average of 7 percent growth for other occupations. This clearly illustrates that this crisis will grow significantly if not addressed immediately by the Oregon legislature.

Many Oregon DSPs must rely on other state funds like Medicaid, housing subsidies and snap benefits to survive. Funding HB2964 will create a sustainable solution to this harsh reality. It is critical that this committee consider the cost savings to other Oregon health and human services when assessing the costs of the bill.

One of the most promising aspects of this legislation is the provision ensuring that wages for these essential workers keep pace each time the minimum wage goes up. This gives DSPs confidence that future earnings will increase as wages in competing businesses increases thereby allowing DSPs to make this essential job a long-term career option.

I look forward to working with this committee and the Oregon Legislature to address any questions or concerns regarding the current issues in the Oregon ID/DD system and creating a more responsive health and human services delivery system that addresses the unique needs of your most vulnerable constituents.

Respectfully,

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Regional Director

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