

We were called essential. We were called heroes.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, adult foster caregivers rolled up their sleeves, focused on our clients even – as with thousands of other businesses across Oregon – we faced unprecedented financial stressors. Our workload increased significantly but we did not walk off the job. Foster caregivers across Oregon increased – not cut – staff, paid overtime and focused on intensified health and safety protocols to safeguard our clients. We got the job done.

We do not consider ourselves heroes, but we do believe our role is essential. We are the boots-on-the-ground caregivers who tend to the most vulnerable of our state.

Yet we are often placed at a severe disadvantage when it comes to our funding. We do not have a special lobbyist as is the case with group homes and nursing homes. Those group homes/nursing homes received immediate relief when the first COVID-19 relief package arrived. We did not. We were instead left to manage a growing crisis with the same dollars as before COVID-19. We were informed that we basically missed the boat. We were told we were not organized enough to secure relief package funding. Those answers to why the funding playing field was not level are troubling. Especially when the items that matter – equity and equality – are factored into the funding template.

Many adult foster homes are owned by people of color and women. That is why adult foster homes are widely seen as a viable path to business ownership – while providing excellent care – to those segments of our population who often marginalized.

Oregon takes pride in being a flagship in issues of equality and equity for marginalized and underserved populations. That is why adult foster care owners/providers deserve to be considered for Federal COVID-19 relief funds. Adult foster care homes should be subsidized at the same rate as other similar businesses in our industry because they provide the same standard of care. Just because adult foster homes do not have a high-powered, high-paid lobbyist to roam the halls of the Legislature is not a good enough reason to deprive them of equal compensation.

The issue is not just one of fairness – though that is a key pillar in my/our argument – but also one of cost-effectiveness. State taxpayers get more value out of adult foster homes than group homes. Obviously, both group homes and adult foster homes are crucial to the greater well-being of our state but why must one suffer a drought of resources – when the other does not - when it comes to essential funding?

Adult foster homes should be subsidized at the same rate as group homes. They provide the same standard of care as a group homes in a more efficient manner over a longer time.

I urge you to use the federally funded \$200 million to right a wrong and appropriately resource adult foster homes to make up for the costs accrued during the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost that continue on due to it.

Time has come today to make the funding playing field level.