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01 February 2022

Chair Gelser Blouin and Members of the Senate Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery Committee,

My name is Larry Deal and I'm the Executive Director of Independence Northwest, one of the Portland metro area brokerages. I'm writing today to thank you for creating this opportunity to celebrate the life and work of the exceptional, the incomparable Kathryn Weit. Her impact on Oregonians with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the people who love and care for them cannot be overstated.

There's a lyric from the Prince song "Sometimes It Snows in April" that brings Kathryn to mind every time I hear it:

"Those kinds of cars don't pass you every day."

The rarity of a spirit - a force - like Kathryn Weit is something that comes along once in a lifetime.

You will never hear someone say, "I met someone just like Kathryn today".

But what you will hear from those touched by her are things like "I was at an IEP meeting and I thought, 'How would Kathryn approach this?'" or "I was struggling to solve a problem and then I remembered something Kathryn taught me" or "I channeled Kathryn and said just what needed to be said, despite how much my voice was quivering".

Nearly a decade ago, I was working with her on a project and we got to talking about the elements of change. So much had happened in terms of supports for people with disabilities in such a relatively short period of time and I asked her, "How did Oregon accomplish so much while other parts of the country floundered?"

"You need four things," she told me. "Advocacy, knowledge, legislation, and funding." By engaging those things with the right people at the right time in the right way, what

happens is transformation: you get a community with changed values and people with disabilities take their rightful place in the driver's seat of their lives.

Kathryn told anyone who would listen that the way we connect is through the power of storytelling. "Tell your story or help someone tell theirs," she would say. That's how you ignite the forces of change. That's how we come to understand (or are reminded) that all of us are interconnected.

Kathryn had a way of quietly planting seeds, supporting growth, generating courage in all of us – from self-advocate to parent, educator to case manager, lobbyist to legislator. She's the voice in so many of our heads reminding us to push forward, take things to the next level, and to never forget what's at stake when it comes to advocacy. Kathryn's wisdom is an essential, enduring nutrient that feeds the vines of this community every day.

Thank you for illuminating her spirit today.

Best,

Larry Deal
Executive Director