Dear Committee members,

I am the single adoptive mom to two children who qualify for Developmental Disability Services. Currently my children are 18 (Javon) and 12 (Olivia), but my son was 16 when the temporary program to pay parents as providers began during the pandemic.

I previously worked as a social worker for Child Welfare, certifying foster homes. When my daughter (younger sibling to my son) entered foster care at 19 months and needed a placement, I tried to continue working full time outside of my home. However, the emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of my two children were such that I could not reliably work a 40+ hour a week job outside of my home with zero flexibility in work hours. I quit my full time job in July 2012 and have since worked a variety of part time jobs that have allowed me the flexibility I need to leave at a moment's notice or take leave as needed without repercussions to meet my children's special needs.

Both of my children have Developmental Disabilities including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder due to their prenatal alcohol exposure. This means that, while they have average to above average IQs, they struggle with nearly every aspect of daily life. Because their challenges most often present as difficult behaviors, it has been historically difficult to find coverage, especially for my son, whose behaviors were more extreme and aggressive. My son struggles to feel safe in groups or outside the safety of our home, so outside support programs (such as after school programs for children with I/DD) were not a fit for him, but he also struggled with having outside providers spend significant (more than 2-3 hours) time in our home with him. He qualified for approximately 250 hours per month but I was often only able to utilize 40-60 of those hours because he couldn't tolerate the unknowns of other caregivers and environments.

Being able to participate in the paid parent caregiver program was life-changing for my family. For the first time in 8+ years, we were financially stable month-to-month without having to worry about going into debt or a deficit at the end of the month due to trying to pay all of my bills. I didn't have to worry about trying to find work outside of my home during the pandemic because I was able to work a 40 hour week as my son's caregiver.

In the past year, I was able to secure some outside DSP hours for my son, which enabled me to start working outside the home as a medical attendant for a medically complex child, while continuing to provide evening and weekend care for my son, first through the temporary program and then as a regular DSP, when he turned 18. I am now returning to school to pursue a nursing degree, which will open up job opportunities for me that are at a rate of pay that is 50%+ what I am currently making.

I truly believe that if we didn't have the stability of the temporary program, I would not have been able to think beyond our current circumstances because there would have been no way for me to dedicate the time and resources necessary to school, when I was already carrying the mental, physical, emotional and financial load for our household.

I believe that ALL families with children who qualify for K-plan should be given the option of utilizing this program. Many, if not most, of the families I know with children who qualify for K-plan and other I/DD Services are struggling to utilize even a portion of the hours available to their children, meanwhile, they continue to provide the same care that a DSP might, without the benefit of being paid.

We love our children and want the best for them, just like all parents. For many of our children, having their own parents, who are 100% committed to their care and well-being, is THE BEST thing for them. They are less likely to experience the changes in quality of care that occur with having outside caregivers (even the best caregivers don't know our children the way we do) which usually means they are healthier and more stable in their day-to-day lives. Fewer hospitalizations and less reliance on crisis-based Mental Health services are just a few of the ways that paying parents as caregivers could benefit the entire state.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our family's story and I hope it will encourage you to vote for a bill like SB 646 that will benefit many families in Oregon, rather than one like SB 91 that will only support children who qualify for the maximum amount of support hours.

Brianna Robbins