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RE: Paid Parent Caregiver policy

To Whom It May Concern:

I have spent the past 22 years of my professional career in providing either direct or administrative support in the field of mental health. In both my professional as well as personal life, I often find the personal stories of those I meet interesting and at times, inspiring. While living in our community since 2018, I have had the privilege of getting to know my neighbor who has 2 sons with special needs. I have watched the loving care both my neighbor and her husband provide their sons. The care they provide is "24-7", non-stop. Although my neighbor's husband also works outside the home and my neighbor often serves as the sole caregiver for her sons, I am amazed and inspired by these parents unwavering devotion to their children. Both sons have medical conditions that are complex. The level of knowledge and skill needed to provide for their care is astonishing, however, both parents have kept their sons happy, as healthy as can be expected, and have provided them with a quality of life that would be impossible to duplicate outside of their home.

Because of my neighbor, as well as other parents experiencing similar challenges in Oregon, I would like to express my support for the "Paid Parent Caregiver Policy" that was enacted by the State of Oregon during COVID. Although the COVID pandemic created numerous challenges, policies enacted by various State governmental agencies also created insights and opportunities regarding how to create more effective policies that should be continued post-COVID. The Paid Parent Caregiver Policy afforded parents of children with special needs and disabilities a financial lifeline. Parents were able to provide the complex level of care these children needed while providing a small financial buffer that enabled these parents to worry less about keeping a roof over their heads and putting food on their table. Although there has been an eager interest for communities to return to pre-COVID conditions, the ability to hire employees in various labor markets remains a well-known challenge. Rural communities such as ours struggled pre-COVID to attract and retain qualified workers. These conditions do not appear to be resolving anytime soon. That is why it is imperative for parents of children with special needs and disabilities, who know the complexities of their children's medical and mental health needs, continue to receive parent caregiver pay. Their knowledge and dedication to their children lessen hospitalizations and institutional care, both of which can create a burden to our State's financial system. Lessening a family's financial worries improves the quality of life for these families who already have challenges providing care for their children. It has been my observation as a mental health professional, that healthy, well-adjusted families create healthy, strong communities.

I am hoping that policy makers will view the Paid Parent Caregiver Policy as an effective policy that should be continued as it affords parents of children with special needs and disabilities the opportunity to provide quality of life and care to their children.

Sincerely,



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