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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB646

Today I'd like to speak to want vs. need. In life, I have asked myself questions regarding want vs. need to keep my decisions in perspective. I'm using this same question regarding SB646. Is this bill speaking to a want or a need? In my professional opinion, I believe this is a need. Allowing parents to be paid providers isn't just a want. It's not a luxury decision. This is a need-driven decision that could potentially change the lives of the children living with disabilities in Oregon for the rest of their lives.

My agency has the pleasure of serving many families in Oregon, yet we still have over 100 families on waitlists due to a limited pool of care providers. The employment market has been limited for many years now, and it's a result of an environment created by the industry's own making. For years care providers have traditionally been underpaid, overworked, and rarely given the appropriate tools to be successful. The unfortunate state of our industry has created a mass shortage of providers nationwide. When an agency or family is lucky enough to hire a provider, there is still the challenge of finding people who truly care about the outcomes and results of the individual they support. Not just hiring someone who is there to check a box.

So what is the ultimate goal to be achieved when we are talking about the lives of individuals living with disabilities? I believe the goal we as a society want to achieve is to provide nurturing, safe environments where individuals living with disabilities are afforded opportunities and choices that will help them grow into the adults they wish to become. But who will provide this environment with the industry as a whole that has so many shortcomings in staffing? The need for paid parent providers is greater now than it has ever been before. Let's for a moment not look at the staggering staffing shortages the state of Oregon is experiencing in the healthcare field, let's look at turnover. The typical turnover in the healthcare field is well over 50% year over year. Now imagine how that turnover affects someone who already has social and communicative delays that prevents them from making friends the same as a neurotypical child. The emotional damage that can and is done by these crazy statistics is unnecessary.

The answer is right in front of us. Parents as paid providers will help alleviate the shortages we are seeing in employing providers, eliminate the turnover issues that can and do cause trauma, and create nurturing, caring, opportunities-driven environments that can support the individuals living with disabilities in achieving their goals in becoming whomever they wish to be as they mature into adulthood. You see the individuals don't want this they need this. The parents don't want this they need this. The need far out weights the wants. As a society we need this, we need to do better, we need to listen to those living with disabilities, and we need to make parents paid providers.