Submitter: Kara Rotella

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB646

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Kara Rotella from Salem and I'm the mother of 10 year old Jacoby Rotella, who was born with a congenital lower limb defect and was diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum at age 3. I am writing in support of SB 646 and the permanency of the paid parent caregiver program.

Jacoby has always struggled with his ability to communicate and advocate for himself. This has led to behavioral issues as he's grown older. He is very apprehensive and closed off to strangers which creates additional barriers for him, especially on the community. Specifically, it has taken 2 years with the same occupational therapist for him to feel comfortable enough to be vocal and communicate freely.

Being my child's primary care provider and direct support worker has eliminated the anxiety and fear that Jacoby has felt in the past when having to work with a stranger and spend excessive time building a rapport with a PSW or DSP. He knows he can count on me and trusts me to have his best interest in mind. Many of Jacoby's specific needs are around personal care and hygiene (and other limitations) that are quite personal and frankly degrading to have to utilize a stranger for. He's now of the age where he is aware of his growing yet changing body and feels more shame and embarrassment needing assistance with things like personal hygiene. Knowing he can turn to his mother, elevates those feelings when he needs to ask for help.

From a parenting standpoint, between Jacoby's various therapies and his mental, physical and behavioral needs, it has been impossible for me to find a job that has the flexibility needed and the understanding that issues can and do arise at any moment, which need my time and attention. Being the mother of a special needs child is my full time job. As his parent, I feel that I have the most in-depth knowledge of his needs, triggers, setbacks and successes. I'm the most equipped individual to care for him while he is navigating his disabilities and growing into a thriving young man.

Since becoming Jacoby's paid care provider in 2022, our family, his educators and his therapists have seen great improvements in many areas that he has previously struggled in. He is more engaged, feels more confident and has started speaking up and voicing his needs. These improvements are a direct result of the collaborative efforts by his vast support team and most specifically, by having a parent as his paid care provider, working with him daily to meet his unique needs. I envision that Jacoby will continue to feel empowered within his trusted community that we have built.

The success of our disabled children in Oregon depends on the passing of SB 646 and making paid parent caregivers a permanent program. Our children are happier and healthier when they have the ability to be cared for by loving and knowledgeable care givers.