

Submitter: Nicole Haack-McCarthy
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure: SB91

To the Oregon Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Nicole Haack-McCarthy and I work in the behavioral health field in an intensive youth services wraparound program. I have been working in the field for the last 7 years and have spent countless hours attempting to support our most complex children.

I strongly believe we need to expand our disability service options to include the ability for parents to become paid-caregivers of their disabled children. In addition, I believe we need to widen the ability for all disabled children's parents to qualify. Right now, what I observe working in the field are many of these services allocated to the families with disabled children are simply a mirage. These youth often do not maintain in traditional schools, need a great deal more support, and it is nearly impossible for their parents to work while caring for their needs. The services many are promised through qualifying for disability services simply have long waitlists, no one to fill positions, or do not exist. The families are then, at the mercy of an impossible task, often after having tried everything in our power, forced to make a difficult choice to look to Intellectual Developmental Disabilities group homes or DD foster care. Although these settings strive to be home-like, it feels like another form of youth being displaced and institutionalized. The homes often are not in their local area, so they are removed from their attachment relationships, further compounding their loss.

To elaborate, living in our area, I see there being an incredible shortage of direct and personal support workers. Even with the many impressive attempts to expand this workforce, there continues to be families that are unserved. Many that have workers have the caregivers leave with short notice or not be reliable. This is a challenge to parents, but also to children, as they are forming relationships with these caregivers. Workers often take on very personal tasks like helping with hygiene and daily living. It can be very damaging for a child to trust and then have numerous losses, based on turnover. Furthermore, behavior support specialist is often able to train these individuals. In our area many of the few behavior support specialists have over year long waitlists. Many children also qualify for respite hours. In the 7 years working in this position with numerous children receiving these services, I have never once seen a family be able to access this option.

Our, well-intentioned, disability services as they currently are designed are not offering enough support to families. We need to expand and try something different. The parents and stakeholders advocating for paid-parent caregivers are offering a cost-effective solution that may benefit the whole family, keep kids out of foster care,

and provide everyone involved with more healthy lives. I hope you might highly consider their very thoughtful solution and move forward with supporting parents as paid caregivers.

Thanks,

Nicole Haack-McCarthy

Qualified Mental Health Associate, Certified Drug & Alcohol Intern, and Master of Social Work Student