

Self Protection, Advocacy and Rights Council
P.O. Box 129 Monmouth, OR 97361
February 8, 2023



To: Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chairs Nguyen and Scharf,
and members of the committee
From: Kristine Merritt, SPARC Mentor
RE: HB 2457

I am writing in support of HB 2457. It ensures that DSPs get the wages they deserve, by moving DSP wages to 150% of minimum wage and covering the Paid Leave Oregon Payroll Expense. DSP wages rose significantly after you agreed to fund the current rate model last session. Thank you for this investment. We would not have survived without it and we need to protect and enhance this investment going forward. The pandemic and changing workforce has continued to erode our progress on wages. Even though providers consistently pay wages above the amount that is funded, we still struggle to hire and retain employees. This complicated, critical work is often paid less than fast food employees. Current reimbursements for these services were built on cost studies that are now years old, so even though service rate models are fully funded, the costs built into these models are significantly behind the current market. I have attached a flier that highlights these key points and shows how DSP wages consistently trend above the reimbursement rate. Please vote yes on HB 2457. DSPs, the people they support and their families are counting on your support!

I have had the pleasure of being a SPARC Mentor for over 20 years, supporting people with disabilities to advocate, empower each other and learn together. I also work as a coordinator of support for a provider and a past Direct Support Professional (DSP). The past 20 years have seen lots of ups and downs, but the past year has been one of the most difficult in my career. Our workforce is at an all time low, we have so many openings that teams are left just trying to cover health and safety, not able to provide the supports that people want and need. We work to recruit and train new team members, to have them leave after a short time. We support people to write amazing plans but are not able to fulfill goals if we do not have DSPs. HB 2457 is a needed step to rebuild ID/DD Services continuity.

DSPs provide supports to people across Oregon, in their homes. They support people to wake up in the morning, take a shower, get dressed, cook meals, take medications, attend medical appointments, go to work, take care of personal business, go shopping, set goals, go for walks, visit friends and family. Many of the people DSPs support have complicated care needs, each person has their own plan and each team works to put that plan into action.

The DSPs in my team are caring, resourceful and dedicated. We have had to adjust constantly to provide supports to people with changing needs. Working week after week of overtime and stretching to fill openings that have not been filled in over a year has left most team members exhausted. We need to be able to offer a living wage and consistent funding that will adjust to increased minimum wage and inflation. The DSP wages go directly to our local communities, the investment that Oregon makes is also matched with Federal Funds. It truly is a win, win!

Thank you,

Kristine Merritt ~ SPARC Mentor
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