

Submitter: Kimberlee Karikka
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure: HB2457

Dear Early Childhood and Human Services Committee Hearing,
January 8, 2023

My name is Kim Karikka and I am writing you to support Oregon's HB 2457

I've worked in the field of Direct Support with Living Opportunities for almost 4 years. I am 62 years old and will be retiring within the next 5 years. This is probably the most challenging of the jobs I've had in my life (and I ran a daycare/preschool for 16 years). This is mainly because of the many different aspects to the job. One minute you're side by side cleaning & cooking, then you're off to go grocery shopping, then to a medical appointment, reconciling financials, documentation of everything we do and all with multiple individuals who experience Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). At any moment you could get a call from your manager that someone got hurt and you need to meet them at the emergency room. You could be there for hours past the end of your shift. We as DSP's must be "jacks of all trades" but can't become the master of anything when we aren't paid enough to survive and become proficient at our job. When you can make as much working fast food, who wouldn't do that? Well, someone like me who gets satisfaction from making a difference in someone's life. To see the faces of the individuals that I support, light up when they see me, knowing that I'm someone they are familiar with and have worked here long enough to develop a relationship with them.

The Covid-19 pandemic took their world from the frying pan into the fire. Feelings of isolation were running rampant. Staff was spending a lot of time talking "counseling" our individuals on the phone, during the times we weren't allowed to support in person, except for emergent needs (medication, food, telemed appts).

In my particular office of Supported Living, I have seen so many staff come and go due to insufficient pay. Only 3 of us out of an office of 12 are still working here since the pandemic hit 3 yrs. ago. In my early days, having individuals say, "You aren't going anywhere are you?" would break my heart. This told me they had seen too many staff leave. Though I will be retiring in a short time, I make this plea for the staff who come after me, and more importantly for the individuals we serve. Though we are not their family, for some, it is the closest they will ever have. The consistency of staffing gives them a sense of security, in a world that that feels far from it

Please support this bill to reduce turnover and create a living wage for myself and all DSP's trying to make a difference in the lives of the individuals we serve.

Thank you for your time.

Kim Karikka, Direct Support Professional