

Hello,

My name is Krista Smith and I am the Executive Director for RISE Oregon, a nonprofit organization that supports people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). RISE has about 700 employees and serves about that many customers with I/DD annually across 16 counties. We support people in their own homes, family homes, our residential and foster homes, in the community, and on-the-job.

I am writing to show my support for HB 2457. It ensures that Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) get the wages they deserve, by moving DSP wages to 150% of minimum wage and covering the Paid Leave Oregon Payroll Expense.

First, I wanted to thank you for supporting I/DD services with increased funding in the last session, which we were able to pass on to our DSPs. Now, it is time to protect that investment.

Though RISE, and many other providers, pay DSPs more than the amount that we are funded, we are still falling behind the pace of inflation. We continue to compete with other frontline workers, like fast food and retail, and struggle to hire and retain DSPs. As a former DSP myself, though rewarding at times, it can also be stressful and difficult work, hardly the minimum.

Through the pandemic, due to the workforce shortage, we had to reduce our capacity to serve, as the demand for our services increased. RISE's in-home services waitlist grew to over 400 families across the state and we had to temporarily close three residential homes; all because we do not have the DSPs to serve our communities.

Paying DSPs a living wage to support some of Oregon's most vulnerable citizens is a bipartisan issue that we can all get behind. It also overlaps with some of this state's top priorities like housing, healthcare and mental health. If passed, this will directly impact the lives of about 50,000 Oregonians; which includes people with disabilities and their DSPs.

Please vote yes on HB 2457. DSPs, the people they support and their families are counting on you!

Thank you,

Krista Smith