

## Living Opportunities Support HB 5026

Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and Committee Members,

Living Opportunities is one of the largest service providers to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Southern Oregon. With our support, the individuals who rely on our services are able to dream bigger, live safer and healthier, accomplish their goals, and engage more deeply in their communities. They are more skilled employees, independent consumers, volunteers and artists; neighbors and friends.

Developmental disabilities include intellectual impairment, autism, cerebral palsy, down syndrome, and other neurological conditions. At Living Opportunities, we all aspire to the same goal: that the individuals who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities live with dignity and experience meaningful connections and rewarding careers.

**As the Chief Executive Officer of this wonderful organization, I am writing in support HB 5026 and for a fully funded I/DD budget.**

Prior funding of IDD services (2021) allowed us to increase wages for DSPs by \$1.25 an hour (current average reimbursement wage for DSPs at \$17.81), yet like many other industries, we still struggle with staff shortages. However, I would argue that unlike some other service industries, the services we provide to those in need add to the critical structure of our community's foundations. We must fully fund our IDD services and provide a competitive wage to attract workers.

I am specifically urging your support for:

- **Fully Funding the current ODDS Budget**
- **ODDS's POP 132 – Targeted Rate Increase estimated to cost \$162M**
  - Includes wage inflation and rate increases that bring DSP wages in payment category 1 to \$19.36, payment category 2 to \$20.38, and to \$22.42 in payment category 4 in the first year of the biennium. Increases the health insurance assumption to \$628.45 (currently \$525) per employee per month and adds the 0.4% employer Paid Leave Oregon payroll tax pick-up.
- **HB 2457 – 150% of Minimum Wage + 1% Paid Leave Oregon Pick-up estimated to cost \$116.9M**

As you are well aware, we are all facing economic headwinds, with hiring a dedicated workforce being among the greatest challenges, especially in areas such as Southern Oregon, where the pool of potential candidates is smaller than in the Portland-Metro area or the Mid-Willamette Valley. The work required is person-centered often-involving personal care and critical to those we serve, yet the average fast-food employee can make more per hour. We are left recruiting those with a true heart for service, but we desperately need a wage that can help us retain them.

As a full time DSP myself for many years before I worked up into leadership roles, I relied on multiple income sources to provide for my family. At one point, I even had to quit the DSP job I loved, due to the increased costs of daycare outpacing my wages. I returned to this workforce because we truly make a difference and have an impact on people's lives and successes. Many of our DSP's continue to sacrifice

time with their families, struggle being able to afford rent, gas etc. When there are emergencies in our communities, like wildfires, our DSP's step up to care for and prioritize the people they support. In 2020 many of our DSP's were working when the Alameda Fire destroyed their homes, they were helping evacuate and ensure the safety of the people they supported, all the while wondering what was happening to their own homes and families. They deserve a wage that reflects the difficult and challenging work they do.

Please vote yes on HB 5026 and full funding of IDD services. Organizations like Living Opportunities need your support so that we can continue to provide support for those who need it the most.

Sincerely,  
Amber Robles Myre  
CEO – Living Opportunities