

To: Sen. Wlnsvey Campos, , Co-Chair Rep. Andrea Valderrama, Co-Chair Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services.
From: Joanne Fuhrman, Co-Director of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.
Date: February 8, 2023
Subject: **Support for HB 5026 – DHS Budget and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities**

My name is Joanne Fuhrman and I am the Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer of Partnerships in Community Living, Inc. (PCL). PCL is a private, non-profit organization that has **partnered** with the State of Oregon for over 35 years to provide support at home, work, and in our communities to over 270 adults, children, and families who live and thrive with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). Today we support people who live in eight counties across the state, from the Willamette Valley to Southern Oregon. I am also the Legislative Chair of the Oregon Resource Association, so I am here representing almost 90 organizations like mine from across the state.

PCL employs over 500 Direct Support Professionals – known as DSPs. DSPs are frontline workers and essential to meeting our mission of, “Expanding the horizons and enhancing the quality of life of those we support.”

The number of DSPs we employ used to be 35% higher, but we have been forced to shrink our services because we cannot find people to fill this vital role. For too long DSPs have been undervalued and underpaid. **PCL and other organizations like ours have no choice but to serve fewer people - even as the need for services continues to grow. This leaves vulnerable families with nowhere to turn.**

Please prioritize DD wages and support full funding of IDD services in HB 5026. I am asking that you not only protect your previous investment made in 2021, but that you continue to help *move this workforce out of the crisis by supporting HB 2457 - it moves DSP wages to 150% of minimum wage.* DSPs are much more than caregivers.

They provide support in all aspects of a person’s life. It is a complicated and challenging job. I started my career as a DSP. I know the joys and the struggles of this job. **This is not minimum wage work, yet despite PCL’s commitment to fair, competitive wages we are continually thrust into direct competition with fast food restaurants who start workers at \$17 to \$20 per hour.**

We cannot compete, so we cannot find workers. Since we can’t find workers we are forced to reduce our capacity - a vicious cycle that is replicated across our state and leaving people with

IDD and their families from getting desperately needed support and, at times, staying in dangerous situations without the help of providers like us. You can reverse this trend.

I urge you to: I specifically urge you to support:

- 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 ● This bill will make further investments into DSP wages – because DSP work is not minimum wage work! HB 2457 statutorily sets DSP wages across the state at 150% of the metro minimum wage and includes the full 1% Paid Leave Oregon pick up (.4% Employer + .6% Employee pick-up).

Please value the work and raise the wage!

PCL, and organizations like ours, are state partners and depend on your funding and investment in the services we provide. We cannot simply raise our prices to increase wages - we rely on the funding you approve to provide these services. **Only you can impact this issue.**

Despite raising wages 38% since 2019, over the last few years we have reduced our workforce from 800 employees to under 600. We used to serve over 300 people, now we are only serving approximately 280 people. We currently have 140 positions open and are struggling to maintain our current, reduced capacity. This situation is not unique to PCL- sadly it is playing out at every organization across the state because this essential workforce is demanding a livable wage and funding just doesn't support that. **Providers are already paying above the reimbursement rate and as you can see it just isn't enough. We don't have any more to give. We need you to step up and help us ensure that people in need continue to have options for services.**

There is no doubt that HB 5026, HB 2457 and POP 132 will have a direct, positive impact on this workforce and the quality of support people with IDD receive in Oregon. Your previous investments in our services that go directly to wages immediately improved our ability to hire and retain this workforce. The gains are short lived, however, as minimum wage increases continue to push wages up, once again increasing competition and forcing us to lose ground. **Supporting will not not only raise wages now, but ensures that we maintain the edge over minimum wage jobs into the future.**

The workforce shortage has a devastating impact on organizations, families and most of all the people who rely on these services. It not only affects their quality of life, but their very health and safety. We must act together to reverse this trend and ensure that people with IDD are provided with the safety net of quality support they deserve.

Supporting these funding requests and investing in this workforce is not only the right thing to do, it is the only thing to do. The realities of undervaluing DSPs is playing out all around us, but it is not too late to turn this around. This bill will send a message that Oregonian's value our vulnerable citizens and those that provide the support they need to be active, valued members of their communities. It will allow us to create a career path for DSPs that will stabilize and grow this workforce. It will allow us once again to open our doors to serving more people in need.