

To: Joint Ways & Means Committee

From: Mary Rose Reynolds

04/12/2023

Subject: Please support our Direct Support Professional Workforce- Value the work, Raise the Wages!

My name is Mary Rose Reynolds, and I am a Supported Living Coordinator with Marie Mills Center, Inc. a nonprofit community organization that assists persons with developmental disabilities to develop to their highest potential and achieve fulfilling lives through the services they receive through our programs which include Employment services, Day Support activity services, Transportation services, and Residential Services to intellectually and developmentally disabled adults.

Being a DSP is a complex job. It means helping and assisting people with intimate personal care such as bathing and dressing, complicated health conditions, challenging behaviors, supporting individuals in their communities, supporting individuals with communication with others, supporting individuals with employment, sometimes nursing type care and hospice care. This is very physically and emotionally draining. Direct Support Professionals are much more than caregivers, they provide guidance and emotional support. DSPs are not just for fun and entertainment. The work these individuals do is valuable and very meaningful to those individuals served.

This is not minimum wage work. Providers are often understaffed and this leads to overtime for many staff and eventually staff burnout. This can have serious negative consequences such as workplace accidents, medication errors and worse yet, more staffing shortages due to staff leaving for easier employment.

I started as a Direct Support Professional 18 years ago. While there have been changes made, and raises since I started many years ago, the cost of living continues to rise. Unfortunately, the current funding situation does not provide for cost-of-living increases, which we have seen substantially increase during the recent COVID19 pandemic. I worry for the Direct Support Providers who must make cuts in their personal lives to continue to afford their current living situation, or those who are considering looking for employment elsewhere so that they can make ends meet at the end of the day. I worry how this will affect the individuals served and their families.

Without help, this situation will only get worse. We cannot compete at the current wage rates, so we cannot find workers. I often hear individuals say, "Why would I want to do that type of work, If I can go to this fast-food restaurant and make \$18-\$20 an hour?"

I have listened to many staff say that they need to leave to find other employment as they cannot financially live with the current wages they make. It is sad to think that our DSPs must work 2 jobs just to make ends meet.

If we do not invest in DSP Wages now, what message are we sending? That we do not care about their work. They are not valued.

Investing in our DSP's is an investment that will reduce costs all around and will provide an incentive for individuals interested to choose being a direct support professional as a career option. This is winning all

around. The individuals served will have more options and opportunities when it comes to their lives and will not be just limited to the necessities due to staffing shortages.

I ask that you please support our Direct Support Professional Workforce and raise the wages. Let's embrace Oregon's efforts toward improving diversity, inclusion, and equity.

This is an opportunity that will allow us to send the message that we care about ALL Oregonians, we value our DSP's who are supporting our most vulnerable citizens. We value stability in this workforce, and we value the quality services provided to our most vulnerable citizens.