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To whom it may concern,

The DD field is in crisis—this is not something to take lightly as it weighs heavily on the individuals we are providing services to. When there aren't enough staff due to under-funding or low wages it is very difficult to retain long term employees because they aren't able to provide for themselves or their families living off of these wages especially with the inflation rates we are seeing across the nation. Employees are being forced to leave in search of higher wages which causes a high turnover rate, and at the end of the day we know our employees are struggling which means our individuals are struggling. Coworkers are left to piece services together and struggle to figure supports out, work extra shifts, and train the new staff. The individuals are left wondering why their staff have left, if the next staff can adequately support them, and if they will relate to the new staff. Families are left wondering how long the next staff will stay, if the new staff will care for their family member as diligently, and with a sense of uncertainty about the stability of the future.

Imagine the impact that has towards our individual's overall quality of life seeing countless DSP's come into their lives just to turn around and search for work elsewhere because they simply cannot afford living on the wages provided. Our DSP's are working so hard day in and day out to provide the best supports, but how can the best supports be given when there aren't enough staff to adequately fill the homes? The thought of low staffing within the DD field is scary because these individuals are people's family members and they trust our DSP's to care for them as they would their own, yet the individuals are the ones impacted because DSP's cannot afford to live on the wages given—it is impossible. Our employees are making less than what their bills are which leads to having to work more hours just to barely get by, and that is taking time away from their families or causing people to feel burnt out. Do you think the right amount of care and supports are being offered when a DSP comes in for their shift after having to work an extra shift just to make ends meet because their wages are lower than their cost to live?

Many DSPs want to continue working in this important and fulfilling career, they want to continue to support the individuals they care for and have relationships with, but it is not



sustainable financially, and they are forced to leave for higher paying positions. The state of Oregon starting March 1, 2023 has now ended extra funding towards SNAP benefits which many people rely on, so now that is money coming out of their pocket that they do not have. These low wages are not allowing people to save for emergencies, car maintenance, the up to 15% increase in rent/mortgages, clothing, education etc.—this is absolutely detrimental to all involved. Programs within our agency like day support activities (DSA) aren't able to reopen because we do not have the staff, and many of the individuals are now missing out on learning new skills within their community. At what point will people start realizing that the quality of life for our individuals shouldn't reflect the wages being earned by our DSP's?

Currently, my position is in management but I worked my way from being a direct support professional, and I know the struggles that my staff are going through. How do you console your employees when they come to you with no choice but to work elsewhere simply due to low wages? Their hearts are within this field and many of our long-term employees have not stayed because of the pay—they stay because they care so much and they know if they leave who is going to be there for the people we support? We have employees choosing to struggle financially, mentally, physically just to fulfill the lives of the individuals they support because that is what they deserve, yet we can't even provide adequate wages for the DSP's who are severely underpaid despite the work they do. We have employees who have unfortunately been diagnosed with medical conditions that these wages are unable to cover because they cannot spare any extra expenses. We have employees who are cashing out their vacation time that they have worked so hard for just to put extra money in their pockets, and in return they don't get to take that trip they were planning for because their rent is past due and that's where the funds will go towards. These are just some of the struggles that we have been faced with and I am sure there are people who struggle in silence. The roles that DSP's play in these individual's lives is something money cannot buy.

I sit here and ask of you to consider the approval of SB 5506 to support all direct support professionals who are facing major financial struggles because of the wages being provided. The DD field will continue to expand despite low wages provided, and it is in your hands to choose whether DSP's should be adequately paid for the roles they play or choose to watch the individuals suffer at the hands of understaffed agencies due to high turnover rates caused by the low wages being offered.