Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Angela Fleming, and I am writing in support of Senate Bill 538.

This is a critical matter that demands immediate attention. Every parent should have the ability to serve as a caregiver for their minor children who meet the eligibility criteria set forth by SB 91. It is imperative that we rectify the current situation.

As a grandmother, I plead with you to hear my heartfelt concerns. I am blessed with two beautiful, intelligent, and extraordinary grandsons, both of whom are eligible for the CEN waiver. While one grandson has successfully entered the program, the other remains stuck at number 548 on the waiting list. Both children face numerous medical challenges, including Autism, Down syndrome, atrioventricular septal defect (AVSD), ventricular septal defect (VSD) requiring open-heart surgery, collapsing airway issues, food protein-induced enterocolitis syndrome (FPIES), various autoimmune diseases, type 1 juvenile diabetes, serious protein allergies, hypothyroidism, Crohn's disease, and colitis. One of my grandsons have had to start biological home infusions and his immune system is compromised. He is very fragile. He can't have a lot of exposure in flu season as it could bring sickness. We all have to be well to visit and not bring in sickness as it could be detrimental.

It is crucial that both of my grandsons are provided with an environment conducive to their health and safety, as outlined by the programs designed to support them. They require a safe, calm, and predictable environment to thrive, especially given their unique and often complex support needs. The decision for parents to leave their children in the care of others is never easy, particularly when the children have such significant medical diagnoses. My daughter-in-law has left the workforce entirely to care for the boys, while my son continues to work to support the family.

I have witnessed firsthand the struggles my son and daughter-in-law face in finding reliable care. The workforce simply is not available and furthermore does not provide the level of care that is vital for children like my grandsons. They deserve caregivers who are not only dedicated but also genuinely care about their well-being, rather than those who are simply in it for financial gain.

Living in a rural community has severely limited my grandsons' access to attendant care services, making the option of a paid parent caregiver essential. I urge you to consider funding each child equitably, ensuring they have access to the necessary care tailored to their individual needs. My son has had to take numerous Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) days due to the extraordinary care demands of his children.

With over 35 years of experience in supporting individuals with disabilities, my husband and I have dedicated our lives to this cause. We have attended numerous state and national conferences advocating for the rights and needs of people with disabilities. We have also played active roles in transitioning individuals from institutional settings to community-based living arrangements, including managing group homes and operating our own foster home for the past 12 years.

From my extensive experience, I can confidently state that when a parent is capable of providing care for their child, it is unequivocally the best option. The shift towards home and community-based services aims to ensure that every individual enjoys and thrives in the least restrictive living arrangement possible. This principle should extend to children as well. What about the children?

Please address the systemic barriers that prevent my grandsons from accessing the most qualified caregivers—their parents—who possess the utmost love and intention for their well-being.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Angela Fleming
Roseburg, Oregon
Fleming Foster Care