

House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

Date: 3/4/25

Written Testimony in support of House Bill 3168

Chair Hartman, Vice-Chairs Nguyen and Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

My Name is Rob Zunke and I am providing public comment in support of House Bill 3168 because it will impact me and the people that I provide services to. I live in Lane County and am a resident of House District 7/Senate District 4. I'm also a proud member of SEIU Local 503. I began my career at age eighteen helping my grandmother as best as I could with little education and believing that family was more important than school. When my grandmother needed a higher level of care, she was put into a nursing home – and it hurt a lot to see how she and her fellow residents were treated as either second class or just “lesser.” My grandmother was a Public Servant - specifically she worked at the Eugene Public Library for 20 years, and to see her disrespected was just heartbreaking. This led me towards a career in the long-term care industry. My job as a Direct Support Professional is a mix of a lot of different things: I cook, clean, and bathe, and I offer social/emotional support because I'm often the main person in the resident's life. I work with adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities and my job is rewarding – I get to see residents out in their community, surrounded by their peers, with no judgement. My work helps residents to be themselves and I love seeing them smiling, laughing and just enjoying life.

I support House Bill 3168 because I believe it will help workers like me, and our residents. I support stricter enforcement of staffing regulations because it matters for safety. There often are not enough people to fill the positions we need (possibly because the agency just simply isn't prioritizing having enough people on staff to fill the residents' needs). This puts me in a position where I am forced to decide which resident needs more of my time and attention. This should never be the case. Residents should receive the level of care they need, not the level of care they get because staffing is insufficient. That's why residents have a Needs Assessments and service planning, and why person-centered care should matter. Not being able to provide adequate support for our residents simply because there isn't a staffing or safety plan in place is not acceptable and it goes against everything we hold dear as healthcare workers.

I have personally been in a situation where I had to care for 3 residents at one time by myself, even though they needed more staff to meet their care needs. Because the agency didn't help to fill the required staffing need, they not only put the resident at risk but also broke Oregon Administrative Rules. While I was preparing breakfast on one specific occasion, one resident was pacing and then fell over and hit his face on the floor. He then began having a seizure, and because he was injured already - blood went all over the floors, walls and door. At the same time, another resident (number 2) was knocking on his bedroom door because he was ready to start his day, but I had to ignore him completely. Both these individuals should have had more than one staff member available to meet their individual care needs. What would you do in this situation, I want to ask? Did the #2 individual deserve to be left unattended while I was forced to prioritize the injured resident needing medical attention simply because we were so short-staffed?

House Bill 3168 will have lasting, positive impacts for my job and my residents' lives. Jobs like mine require consistency and oversight, which must start with safety planning and ensuring adequate staffing levels for our residents. Residents NEED and DESERVE better than what they're currently getting because agencies have shown over and over again that they must be held to account to do what is right. My experience clearly shows lasting impacts when lack of agency oversight leads to safety issues.

As a Direct Support Professional, I care deeply about the care and wellbeing of every resident and vulnerable population in Oregon, like the residents at Alvord-Taylor. As members of the community we serve, our work must be valued. Without better emergency protocols and staff-to-supervisor ratios, this industry will dissolve. Our work is imperative because our communities are relying on us for their voices to be heard and seen.

In closing I ask the Chairs, Vice-Chairs, and members of the Committee to support House Bill 3168. There are a lot of lives at stake when it comes to caregiving. We as Oregonians are looking to you to lead in this moment.

Thank you for your time and consideration

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