

Good afternoon, Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Munoz, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Natasha Atkinson, and I have the privilege of serving as the CEO of Umpqua Homes, Inc., in Roseburg. I began my career as a Direct Support Professional. I am here to testify against Oregon House Bill 3838.

The bill implies that agencies like UHI are in need of stronger regulation due to unsatisfactory working conditions. However, the reality is we best serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities only by being great employers. While national average turnover rates were 49%, last year, UHI had a turnover rate of just 8.2%, demonstrating our commitment to our employees and the people we serve.

Every year, we come before the legislature to advocate for higher DSP wages. Over the past few years, we have made significant strides towards livable wages. UHI has utilized these increases effectively and pays an average wage of \$20.12, despite the current rate model reimbursing at about \$18.77. And to be clear, UHI is not alone in this fact.

IDD services are consistently underfunded, and HB 3838 does not address this issue nor does it raise DSP wages. A study, commissioned by the legislature identified a \$558 million dollar funding gap for community providers alone. Resources should be dedicated to addressing the crisis resulting from this shortfall rather than creating unnecessary oversight.

SEIU introduced this bill. If they had focused as much on collaborating with community provider organizations to raise worker wages as they did on creating this new regulatory board, DSPs and people with disabilities would already be in a better place. It is important to note, to my knowledge, SEIU has never fought for DSP wages. Imagine the difference if these efforts were redirected towards meaningful wage increases.

House Bill 3838 raises costs and adds unnecessary bureaucracy without improving wages for DSPs. I urge you to consider the negative effects of HB 3838 and to prioritize direct investments in the workforce that truly support the needs of individuals with disabilities and the dedicated professionals who serve them. Together, we can create a system that is both effective and compassionate.

Thank you for your time and consideration.