

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shaun Notdurft. I have been a Direct Support Professional working in community group homes for the Oregon Supported Living Program in Eugene for nearly 32 years. Care work needs a voice in Oregon, please vote "yes" for HB 3838 to establish this essential standards board.

OSLP operates 17 group homes and several more independent individual locations. We support 66 people at this time. I am fortunate that I am at one of the few group home providers in the state that is represented by a union, SEIU 503. This means we are able to bargain for our wages directly with our employer. However, this is limited by the standards set in the rate model, and there are no worker voices in the creation of the rates. Though OSLP pays us fairly well based on the rate model, it is not sufficient. I am nearly at my 32nd anniversary, and I make \$20.66 per hour, with my decades of experience and dedication to this field. I will not be getting a raise any time soon, if ever. I'm capped out, and have been for 22 years. The money simply isn't there.

One might ask, well then why haven't I looked for something more lucrative? Simple answer: because I love what I do. I love the "why" of this job, assisting vulnerable persons to discover their agency and inclusion in the community. I love what I can bring: my knowledge, history, imagination, and intuition. I have value, and in return I give value. What I must witness in exchange is the effect that low wages have. From the work perspective, it becomes difficult to recruit new workers due to competing economic incentives from other jobs, such as fast food. It is difficult to have consistent retention as people must make difficult choices in order to support their families. Turnover has a negative effect on the persons who receive support, as their relationships are changing, and it is difficult to build trust over time when time is no option for them. I could go into great depth on this.

There is also the tremendous waste of money. Saving money by paying less to providers actually costs more money in training, paying out overtime, and responding to crisis situations that occur when supports are not at their prime. I know that every worker out there in every job wants better pay. The truth of the need for good wages in this unique job is brutal, to the employers, to the people supported, and to the workers. The personal effects are profound. Not having enough pay to even meet basic needs is difficult. Not having anything extra for our quality of life affects our mental health, which affects our ability to support. It is all intertwined, for this affects the lives of the people we support. Is money the only solution? Of course not, there is so much more work to do, including other things that would be in the purview of the standards board. Having a

voice into the system to increase wages is a huge start, though, and benefits everyone, including Oregon.

I believe that it is self-evident that staffing levels are incredibly important. It has a direct impact on support. The three men I work with in their group home were all incarcerated in the Fairview institution. For reasons I will not specify, they do not have access to the community without staff, 1:1 ratio, nor can they be home alone. If there's only one staff on shift, the bare minimum home support, then that means everyone stays home. Warehoused. Re-institutionalized. One can still find quality of life in their home, if that is a choice. When it is essentially a mandate, when the community that they belong to is forbidden by circumstance not of their choosing, that is both triggering old traumas and simultaneously delivering new trauma. No one wants to feel captive. This has a causal effect on staff safety. As mental health erodes, as needs aren't met, there are consequences. Some are 'behaviors' that we are trained to de-escalate, albeit not sufficiently consistent across the state. Others are varying degrees of descent into mental health crises... we receive very little training on this. A frequent reaction to the stresses the people supported are feeling can be violence, often directed at staff. One might easily see, then, that the causal effect of insufficient staffing creating a potentially hazardous environment combined with working alone is a recipe for disaster, and the evidence of my claim is empirical and abundant. This is, for the most part, entirely preventable. Having a voice on a standards board is a path towards improvement that is in dire need.

Many care workers also experience a compounded health crisis. The stress of the job, the stress of the low pay, the lack of team-based support all contribute to problematic personal health outcomes. Then they are confronted by totally insufficient health care. Many have very expensive coverage, and/or insufficient coverage. This spirals downward, resulting in even more turnover and being in an unhealthy state that impacts the quality of support. I am fortunate to be in the Essential Worker Healthcare Trust, which has been a huge game-changer for me and my coworkers. A standards board that includes the voices of workers who know the positive side of health coverage, and the horrible realities of insufficient care, is paramount for change, and change must happen.

Another important life consideration is retirement. At OSLP, there is a plan, but it is non-matching, no employer contribution at all. I believe that there are only four out of two hundred employees who are enrolled. It is an insidious trap, in which one is not paid enough to contribute to a plan solely, for it simply won't have enough impact. We can't save enough to set aside, when we're barely handling our financial obligations- and most of us already do live fairly austere lives. When we retire, we are often hit

disproportionately by work-related health consequences. We have no money saved. Social security is not much help given our low lifetime wages. I've seen too many workers die young, destitute. A few have ended their own lives... after a life of giving for others. If it sounds like I'm painting a picture of horror, it is because I am. That horror is my future.

The opposition to this bill, composed almost entirely of business interests in maintaining a "worker voice-free" environment, will be saying that "there is already oversight in place, and strict standards." This is true. What is equally true is the undeniable fact of my 32 years of experience working in the I/DD field that the standards are insufficient. Oregon can, and should, do better. The 'oversight' is superficial. I have personally witnessed clear violations that simply get cleaned up prior to the licensing visit that happens every two years. It must improve. They will say "we're the best in the country, and our company is innovative, we'll be stifled by this bill." Well, we are among the best. This in no way should allow inference that we're good enough. I have seen talent and visionaries stifled by people who run these companies, because we meet the bare minimum requirements. I know beyond any realm restrained by bureaucracy that we have so much more we can do. They will say that they care about DSPs... then why do they seek to keep our voices off of this board? And, if their fears are genuine, why would they not want their own voices on this board, in partnership with the very workers they claim to "love?"

I happen to work for one of the better employers. I can state, and would challenge anyone to refute, that the company improved exponentially when worker's voices, concepts, and vision could enter the equation once we gained protection by joining SEIU 503. It increased partnership, the full picture was finally in the discussion. I fully respect my employer's right to run their operation, and assert that their understanding in this is greatly assisted by having the people who actually do the frontline work have a place in the planning. It is not that they were bad actors without us, they simply had limited vision, despite how progressive they intended to be. Their participation on this board is as equally supported by this worker as the worker portion is. Tremendous gain is at hand. Though Oregon endeavors to do what is best, the full perspective is lacking there as well. This board can resolve that. It is not "duplicative," as they will tell you. It is inclusive. Finally.

Just a quick note on "the union opposed rate increases for DSP wages," which the opposition claims. I am a union worker. I am on the 503 Board of Directors. I have been active since 1996, including politically, and SEIU has provided me several opportunities and support to lobby and testify for my wages. The dirty truth is that the Rate Model that provides for our funding is wholly outdated. It is inadequate. The

Burns Rate Study implementation that SEIU opposes is due primarily because there are 'for profit' bad actors enriching themselves. This is where the "20% profit" lives. Rever Grand is one of them. The opposition is to force change to a broken system that desperately needs reform. It is not opposition to the represented workers. I am one, and I stand with my union not out of requirement or loyalty, for I balk at both of those concepts. I stand in unity because it is true, and I demand to have a voice in change. A brief example: in the rate structure, there are a number of days that are unfunded for staffing under the assumption that people supported will be staying with family members, presumably for Holidays. Well, most families in my experience are either absent by choice or by inherent dysfunction. This is a state presumption that is not rooted in adequate fact. Not to mention, the rates currently assume that we live in 2016, and the Burns rates are based on 2019... nothing is in there that indicates any connection to reality, such as the Covid inflation, and despite promises to the contrary, we're seeing no relief.

I understand the opposition's fears. Some are even valid. Most are not, but absolutely must be addressed. I believe that if this board is actualized, the partnership between employers, workers, people receiving support, and Oregon could be profound. It is not a zero-sum game, there need not be a "loser," and I'm quite tired of being on that end of the stick. I do not seek this board to become reality to harm the employers or the people supported. Logic. I work for one of those employers, and I support three men in this system. The vast union conspiracy they express fearing simply does not exist. Even if it did, there are voices such as mine within that union. What I can tell you is that we did not unionize under the sunny disposition of a benevolent employer. We wanted our perspective in the mix. That's it. Not for wages, not for power, not for control... for influence... to advocate, protect and in legally mandated spaces such as a bargaining table. This bill just might facilitate more organizing of workers in the industry, and fully disclose, I support that with every fiber of my being. But that is not what this bill is doing, at least not directly. It is about change. Positive change. I predict, if HB 3838 passes, that by 2029 when things are really rolling, that the opposition will be singing praises. I know I will be.

It is clear that I support HB 3838 to create the Community and Home-Based Care Workforce Standards Board. The present systems that support care in Oregon have not been sufficient, not out of malice but out of an absence of perspective. Worker voices in balance with the employers will bring that perspective to better inform the decisions that affect us and the people we support. Having BOLI on the board is an essential and necessary oversight step. I know that this will result in more effective governance by and for the people. I ask that HB 3838 receive your support.

Shaun Notdurft