

Submitter: Cari Bacon Flick
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006
Value the Work, Raise the Wage

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Vice Chairs and Committee members, my name is Cari Bacon Flick and I am the Chief Human Resources Officer for Albertina Kerr, a non-profit who supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health challenges. I am here to advocate for our more than 300 Direct Service Professionals who support our clients in welcoming and supportive homes. I'm asking that you prioritize funding for IDD services.

Thanks to the DHS Wage and Rate study conducted at the legislature's request, we know that \$558 million is needed to properly fund IDD services. This shows an urgent need for investment in our Direct Service Professionals (DSPs).

Albertina Kerr pays our DSPs an average of \$21.31 an hour. We are currently funded, on average, at \$18.77 per hour. We pay \$2.50 more per hour, or \$5,200 annually, more than our reimbursement rates to recognize expertise, tenure and contributions. Our average length of service is a little over 8 years, and our DSPs are not only caretakers, but they teach skills, they ensure engagement in our communities, support someone in their employment, collaborate with families of origin, and many other activities to ensure the people we support receive person-centered supports.

So how do we do it? We essentially "rob Peter to pay Paul" in order to fund this wage, and do this in the face of increasing costs. For example, we are currently working to absorb this year's estimated 13% increase to our employee's healthcare benefits costs. This is not sustainable for non-profits who are funded almost exclusively by the state.

Consider also that MIT's living wage calculator estimates a living wage in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties to be an average of \$28 per hour – almost \$9.23/hour more than the current average reimbursement rate. That's over \$19,000 annually.

As an HR professional, I'm used to competing for talent, just like any other organization. Unlike in the private sector, where I've spent most of my career, we had the option to increase prices to fund wage increases. In this business model, we cannot compete for talent if the legislature won't fund competitive wages. If we cannot pay competitive wages for our DSPs, we will not be able to serve our most

vulnerable citizens.

I'll close with this comment we received from a DSP who left our organization after only 5 months because they needed higher pay and better benefits. "The staff that provide direct care to the clients are amazing and they really care about what they are doing. They cook amazing meals, keep the home clean and warm and safe for the clients. They try to go above and beyond to provide good care...They encourage the clients to grow and be as independent as possible."

Please prioritize funding for IDD services and provide any increase possible to begin filling the \$558 million gap.

Thank you.