

March 24, 2025

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-chair Sanchez and respected members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

Thank you so much for being in Gresham this weekend! We so value your service to the citizens of Oregon.

My name is Allen Cress. I represent Edwards Center, a Washington County staple for more than fifty years. We are privileged to serve more than two hundred adults with developmental disabilities.

You're no doubt aware of the **\$558M** gap identified in the Wage and Rate study conducted at the legislature's request. The number seems shocking, but we need to recognize that this is not a sudden issue. This is indicative of an ongoing deficit. As a nonprofit, Edwards Center doesn't need to worry about big returns. We do not need to feed hungry investors. But we do need to pay our staff a wage that is sustainable, will keep them in this worthy field, and maintain a structure that's critical in the lives of so many people living with developmental disabilities. Edwards Center's current staff turnover remains just over 30%. Most other industries would look at that number as shockingly high. In Developmental Disabilities Services, however, I think we're probably among the lowest. The primary reason for leaving reported in exit interviews is DSP pay. Edwards Center takes responsible steps, including keeping our admin expenses down to **just over 10%**. Our revenue goes back into our programs.

Direct Support Professionals are carrying the weight of Oregon's DD System on their shoulders by being willing to work for sub-par wages, sacrificing their own well-being and financial stability to stay involved in this worthy work.

The state's current rate model assumes an average DSP wage of \$18.77/hour. Edwards Center's average DSP wage is close to \$3.00 more than that, and it is not near enough to maintain a stable workforce. We **MUST** raise that wage. We do not have the luxury of, for example, increasing the cost of a burger to pay our staff more. We are almost entirely dependent on state and federal match funds.

Edwards Center and many other programs have been forced to make the difficult decision to close programs and reduce staff. This is unfair to our family, friends and neighbors with developmental disabilities who count on our system to come through for them. Without increased funding, access to services **will continue to shrink**.

PLEASE, support increased funding for I/DD Services in the 2025-27 budget.

Very respectfully submitted,



Allen Cress
Executive Leader, Edwards Center, Inc.