

Support for HB 2150 – Stabilize IDD Services with Annual COLA and Essential Funding

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services,

My name is Amber Myre, and I serve as CEO of Living Opportunities, a nonprofit agency in Jackson County supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) for over 50 years. We employ over 150 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and support hundreds of individuals to live full, meaningful lives in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

I am writing today in strong support of HB 2150 and the proposed amendment 1 that would require the Department of Human Services to include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in provider contracts. This structural change is essential for ensuring long-term sustainability of IDD services across Oregon—and it must be accompanied by a strong investment to address the **urgent and well-documented funding shortfalls identified in the 2023 DHS Rate & Wage Study**.

Why a COLA Is Critical to Prevent Future Crises

Without an automatic annual COLA, community-based IDD providers fall behind year after year as inflation drives up operating costs. We face rising wages, insurance, housing, transportation, and compliance costs—but no built-in funding mechanism to keep up. When minimum wage increases each year (based on the same CPI), our reimbursement rates do not. That creates structural instability, forces service reductions, and ultimately undermines the health and safety of Oregonians with IDD.

An embedded COLA would stabilize provider rates and ensure that services do not continue to erode every budget cycle.

What the Rate & Wage Study Reveals

In 2023, at the Legislature's direction, the Department of Human Services conducted a comprehensive Rate & Wage Study to examine Oregon's IDD service system. The study—completed in January 2025—found a \$558 million funding gap between what providers are paid and what is required to offer sustainable, quality services and competitive wages for DSPs.

The current average state reimbursement for supports across our Living Opps services is DSP wages of \$18.77/hour.

But providers like Living Opportunities must pay more—our average DSP wage is \$21.37/hour (starting wage of \$18.50)—just to try and stay staffed. And we still can't keep up with fast food, drive through coffee stands and retail jobs offering similar or higher wages.

Staff vacancy rates remain above 30% statewide, and turnover threatens continuity of care for people who rely on trusted, consistent relationships.

The Rate & Wage Study clearly defines what needs to be done. Now, HB 2150 and its COLA provision represent a first and essential step in turning those findings into action.

Why It Matters for the People We Support

Our DSPs are more than caregivers. They are coaches, communicators, protectors, and advocates. They help people manage medications, navigate housing, pursue employment, and live in safety and dignity.

When a longtime DSP recently left due to financial strain, a person we support—who has autism and relies heavily on routine—experienced emotional and behavioral distress. Their well-being was deeply impacted by the disruption. And this story is not unique—it happens again and again because we are unable to retain skilled, compassionate staff in a system that does not fund them adequately.

The Time to Act Is Now

HB 2150 will ensure that provider contracts account for inflation through an annual COLA, a common-sense policy already applied to Oregon's minimum wage. But this policy alone is not enough. We also urge the Legislature to prioritize funding the gaps identified in the DHS Rate & Wage Study to restore stability and protect services.

Let's not wait until the next emergency to fix a system that is already stretched beyond its limits. **We urge you to support HB 2150 and take the first steps toward full funding of Oregon's IDD services.**

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,
Amber Myre
Chief Executive Officer
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