

3/27/25

Senate Committee on Human Services

Re: Testimony on SB 133

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee

My name is Joy'e Willman, and I've dedicated over 30 years of my life to supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). I began working with my client in the early 1990s, and transitioned into a DSP role when brokerages opened, continuing at the brokerage until 2020—just before COVID. For 26 of those years, I supported the same person, long before the term "PSW" even existed. My experience spans agency work, brokerage services, and the evolution of Oregon's I/DD system.

I'm here today to express my concerns about the proposed mandatory Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for I/DD agency providers. While I absolutely agree that DSPs and PSWs deserve fair wages and benefits, I don't believe this bill is the right way to achieve that. Here's why:

1. A Mandatory COLA Doesn't Guarantee Fair Wages for Workers

The amendment requires annual adjustments to agency contracts, but there's no requirement that these increases be passed on to workers. In my decades of experience, I've seen too many agencies absorb funding increases without improving wages or benefits for frontline staff. If the state is going to tie funding to inflation, it must mandate that a fair percentage goes directly to DSPs—not just to agency overhead or profits.

2. Performance and Accountability Should Matter

When I was a DSP, my agency conducted yearly evaluations. If we're going to tie funding increases to anything, it should be tied to performance standards—not just automatic adjustments. Agencies that provide high-quality care, fair wages, and good working conditions should be rewarded. Those that don't should be required to improve before receiving additional funding. An automatic COLA removes accountability and doesn't incentivize better care or better wages.

3. The System Needs Equity—Not Patchwork Solutions

Since starting in this work, I've seen huge disparities in how workers are treated across different agencies. Some agencies are wonderful; others are not. Instead of piecemeal policies like this COLA, we need systemic solutions that ensure all workers—whether in agencies, brokerages, or homecare—have fair wages, benefits, and worker protections.

Many of us already share training requirements (like CPR), yet our pay and benefits vary wildly. It makes no sense to have such fragmentation in a system that does the same work. If the state truly wants to support DSPs and PSWs, it should create uniform wage standards, benefits, and career pathways—not just give blanket increases to agencies without accountability.

If the state moves forward with this bill, it should:

- **Require agencies to prove wage increases are passed to workers** (e.g., through pay stubs or wage audits).
- **Tie funding to performance evaluations**—rewarding quality care, not just automatic inflation adjustments.

I've spent my life advocating for individuals with I/DD and the workers who support them. This bill, while well-intentioned, risks funneling money into agencies without ensuring it reaches workers. Let's fix the system in a way that truly supports DSPs, PSWs, and the people we care for, not just for-profit agency pockets.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Joy'e Willman

Multnomah County, Oregon

Personal Support Worker & Advocate