

3/28/25

House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

Re: Testimony on HB 2150

Chair Hartman, Vice-Chairs Nguyen and Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shaun Notdurft. I am a Direct Support Professional, working for the Oregon Supported Living Program in Eugene. I have had this job for almost 32 years. I am writing to urge your support for HB 2150-2. It is long overdue for DSPs to have a mechanism in statute to ensure that our wages can stay above Oregon's minimum wage. Not long ago, rates were adjusted significantly to lift our starting wage above minimum wage. But without a COLA attached to that, this gap has eroded, and likely will be entirely absent by July 1, 2026. It is imperative to have a competitive gap in order to both recruit and retain workers at OSLP.

The work that I do is incredibly rewarding. It is often also very difficult and requires a tremendous amount of focus and knowledge. Having the invasion of stress on the job regarding being able to pay bills and afford just basic sustenance is entirely counterintuitive when you are asking a workforce to have someone's life and well-being as their responsibility. Beyond that, the quality of our support is under constant challenge when there is rampant staff turnover and low morale, due to being chronically undervalued. Though the rate model by which we receive our funding is a separate challenge, attaching a COLA now will have immediate advantageous effects.

In addition to being a DSP for 32 years, I have also been a member of SEIU 503 for nearly 29 of those years. Due to that, our Collective Bargaining Agreement affords us the right to work directly with our employer to set our wages, limited by what Oregon sends our way. We are currently in stasis there, with a Wage Reopener provision that has nowhere to go without an infusion of additional resources, and presently we're tapped out. This COLA will allow us to bargain for, and receive, a much-needed raise. Even the hope of it is already galvanizing workers and management alike, showing the true beauty of collaboration in a unionized shop when the state allocates desperately needed dollars. As it stands, at nearly 32 years on the job I make \$20.66 an hour.

I am not, by nature, a unilateral thinker. To that end, I would like to advocate for a few things to be added to this wonderful bill:

- There must be a wage pass through for workers to ensure that the intent of this bill is truly realized.
- There must be a mechanism by which employers can appeal to the state to recoup losses incurred over the years as they exhausted reserves to keep up with minimum wage and to

attempt to remain competitive in the field for recruitment, exacerbated almost exclusively by a lack of a COLA all this time.

- Other support models providing care to vulnerable Oregonians, such as PCWs and HCWs should also have a mechanism that keeps up with inflation. Inclusion in this bill would be beneficial, not only to this group of workers but to the entire industry. For all the years I have been involved in this industry, there has been an enforced epidemic of competitive advocacy: Homecare bargains higher wages with the state, surpassing DSPs; DD Providers and my union successfully advocate for rate adjustments, surpassing Homecare workers... we are constantly bickering over crumbs from the pie, forcing some to remain at the bottom for others to rise. This dynamic is despicable and must end. Having an across-the-board COLA frees us from those intentionally imposed chains. "Care" should mean a level playing field for all, not just for whom the shouting is loudest. I know this is a huge economic ask for this essential lifting for all, and Oregon must find a way.
- If at all possible within the intent of this bill, there must be strict limitations put on the Standard Model agencies who are reaping a profit from the state's funding. I find it highly unethical for this practice to be rewarded, quite literally at the expense of companies like OSLP who provide excellent service to the state and person-centered support to vulnerable Oregonians in need of the skills of a person such as myself. For shareholders who do not do the work in this industry other than to pirate resources is a tremendous waste, and casts doubt from onlookers about the efficacy of the entire system. This must end, or at the very least be curtailed to more realistic and reasonable business focusing on care instead of profit.

My coworkers are in desperate need. There is essential need for change, and HB 2150-2 is an excellent beginning. Please support this bill.

Sincerely,

Shaun Notdurft