



April 1, 2025

To: Sen. Wlnsvey Campos, Co-Chair
Rep. Andrea Valderrama, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

From: Stephanie Beeck, Executive Director

RE: Support for HB 5526

Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and members of the committee,

I am Stephanie Beeck, the Executive Director of Pearl Buck Center, a nonprofit organization that supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Lane County. The individuals we support rely on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to live and thrive in their community. Examples of this critical support include: supporting someone build the skills they need to get and maintain a job; helping someone track and pay their bills so that they can live independently; providing intimate personal care; and making sure that someone with complex safety and/or medical needs is supported so that they can make the choice to stay in their family home and everyone is safe while doing so. Being a DSP is a complex job, and my staff provide essential, demanding and skilled work. The tasks that they perform are not minimum wage work and yet the current rate models underestimate actual competitive wages and are leaving us unable to pay little more than that.

In the past 5 years, providers of IDD services like Pearl Buck Center have seen a less than 3% increase in our rates. During the same period, inflation increased exponentially. As a provider agency, Pearl Buck Center can't simply raise the prices for the supports that we provide to cover the increased costs of operating year after year. As a state partner, we rely on you to approve funding for these services. The current level of funding is based on studies that were completed years ago and are incredibly outdated. At your direction the DHS Wage & Rate study was completed, and we now know that \$558 million is needed to properly fund IDD services in Oregon. For the first time we have a concrete amount showing the true funding gap. I know this number is very high, but it reflects the chronic underfunding and the urgent need for investment.

Without action, Pearl Buck Center cannot keep up with rising costs. We can't continue to pay wages that are falling drastically behind the market for the critical support that is being provided. We are dealing with high turnover, service disruptions and reduced access for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our employees are having to make difficult decisions between staying at a job that they prefer, supporting a mission and people that they love vs taking a job that pays more so that they can meet their own basic needs of paying their rent or affording food and childcare for their family. I urge you to rectify this situation as our DSPs, the people they support, and their families are counting on you.

Please support HB 5526 and prioritize funding for IDD services and provide any increase possible to begin filling the \$558 million gap.