

Submitter: Willard Burks  
On Behalf Of: Pearl Buck Center  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5526

I Support SB5526

Oregon's IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) services are facing a critical funding gap, with an estimated \$558 million needed to ensure these services are properly supported. This is the first time we have a clear, concrete figure that demonstrates the true extent of the funding shortfall, based on the findings of the DHS Wage & Rate study conducted at the legislature's request.

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), the backbone of these services, deserve fair wages. These professionals perform essential, demanding, and skilled work to support individuals with disabilities, yet they are paid far below sustainable levels. The current funding and wage models do not account for competitive wages, leaving service providers struggling to recruit and retain staff. As a result, many DSPs are forced to leave the field for higher-paying jobs in industries such as fast food or retail, where wages are often more competitive.

The consequences of this funding gap are deeply felt by both DSPs and the individuals they support. People with disabilities often experience instability and a reduction in the quality of care when DSPs are lost or forced to adjust to new staff members due to high turnover. Stories abound of individuals with disabilities experiencing setbacks when their regular DSPs leave, leading to emotional distress and disruptions in their daily routines.

Increasing investment in DSP wages will directly improve the quality of service and the stability of care provided to these vulnerable individuals. Many DSPs love their work but are faced with the hard reality of needing higher wages to support their families. For many, the choice between continuing in a demanding job they are passionate about and seeking more financially stable alternatives is an ongoing challenge.

SB5526 is a critical step toward addressing this funding gap and ensuring that DSPs are compensated fairly for the essential work they do. By supporting this bill, we can ensure that both DSPs and the individuals they support receive the stability and care they deserve.