

April 3, 2025

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and members of the Committee

My name is Joanne Fuhrman, and I'm the CEO and Co-founder of the non-profit provider organization Partnerships in Community Living. I have worked in this field for over 40 years. Today, PCL supports over 200 children, adults, and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities across Oregon and employs over 500 DSPs.

I'm here today to ask to prioritize funding for community providers and their Direct Support Professionals so we can continue to provide essential support to the people we support with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

As many of you have heard, IDD Community Providers are 99% funded by state and federal dollars. That means, without your intervention, we're forced to make up the difference ourselves without a sustainable way to keep up with rising costs. Currently, PCL and providers like us across the state pay, on average, \$2.50 more per hour than the \$18.77 wage funded in our rate model. For us, that's \$2.1 million every year that we must come up with beyond what the state provides just to do right by those we support and the amazing people doing this work. We've only been able to do this by dipping into our limited reserves.

It has become increasingly difficult to keep up with market conditions. In the last three years, we've spent over 30% of those reserves; raising starting wages, providing annual increases for our dedicated DSPs, and keeping up with the rising cost of health care, operations insurance, and day to day expenses. Without your action, this is not sustainable. At this rate, our reserves will run out within the next four years. I know that our organization is not alone.

The DHS Rate & Wage study you just heard about shows a \$558 million gap between the cost of services and what community provider organizations are paid. This did not happen overnight. It is the result of chronic underfunding of these organizations. Addressing this gap is an essential step in providing our hard working team members the wages they deserve and stabilizing the provider system - organizations that have been the State's dedicated partners in providing person-centered, quality services for years.



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Our state must support this workforce. DSPs are much more than caregivers. They provide support to the people we serve in all aspects of their lives. They are not just there for fun times or to celebrate someone achieving a significant goal. They guide people through a complicated healthcare system, they help people learn to manage themselves through anger and frustration, they are grief counselors when someone loses a family member or loved one, they provide complicated, intimate personal care, and sadly, they may guide someone through the end of life. **This is not minimum wage work; this is not a temporary job. It is a skilled profession. Each year that goes by without addressing wage issues for DSPs, our system is weakened and our provider system comes closer to collapse.**

The people we support deserve stability. They deserve to have people they trust to support them. Our DSPs deserve living wages so they can focus on the people we support and not how they will make rent this month. The provider system can not continue to be forced to make the impossible choice between keeping our doors open to provide high-quality support and paying fair wages to our staff.

I urge you to show the community provider system, the Direct Support Professionals we employ, and the people we support that Oregon values them, values their work, believes in fairness, and is committed to sustaining quality support for people with I/DD. Please increase IDD funding in the DHS budget to take a meaningful step towards closing the \$558 million gap. I also ask you to support **HB 2150-2**. It adds an annual cost-of-living adjustment so we don't fall even further behind.

Respectfully,

Joanne Fuhrman, MRA, SPHR, SHRM-SCP
CEO-Partnerships in Community Living, Inc.