

Submitter: Cari Shaw

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5526

To whom it may concern:

My name is Cari Shaw and I am a direct support provider (DSP) with Living Opportunities in Medford Oregon. I work a graveyard position, 11pm - 9am, 3 nights a week, along with working 1 swing shift a week. I pick up any extra shifts when possible, when other staff are out sick or taking vacation. I have been with Living Opportunities for 2 years and absolutely love my job. Working the graveyard shift makes it possible to also visit my adult son, who has autism and lives in a group home close by. The staff and individuals I work with are the best, I enjoy coming in to work and seeing how we all make a difference in the lives of the people we support. I have seen individuals grow and blossom over the past 2 years and I know my efforts, along with all the other staff, have made that happen. I can't imagine working any place else that would have this big of an impact on so many people's lives.

This being said, I work 38-40 hours on average a week. Some weeks it is more, depending on what is going on with staff and the needs of individuals. I live alone on my single income and have been struggling with my income, especially over the past 6-9 months. With the way rent, groceries and bills are increasing, I have been having a harder and harder time with my income. I struggle each month with rent, visit food banks to help with food and family often steps in to help with groceries as well. I have looked at other apartments to rent, but the apartments that are less expensive have a long wait list or are in high crime and drug areas, which with being a single woman, I don't feel safe in. I am lucky that I own my vehicle but over the past 6 months, I've had repairs that have needed to be done so I can continue working. I also needed new tires, which I was able to do but this bill ate into my rent money and I needed to ask family again for help. At one point, I was working a second job just to make enough to cover basic bills. I left the second job, as working graveyard along with day shifts proved to be too much and I was not getting the rest I needed. While working a second job, I was lucky to be getting 6 hours of sleep a day, often less.

I have looked for other jobs and still consider getting a second job, especially over the past 6 months. It is very frustrating and often humiliating to ask family and friends for money or assistance when I am working 40 hours a week. There have been many weeks where I have worked 50+ hours and I'm still stretched thin financially. I used to qualify for the Oregon Health Plan, but now I make too much for that. I get health insurance through Living Opps but have a deductible and also need to pay out of pocket for medications. It is a frustrating feeling to question if I should buy food or my

meds. I don't need a fancy lifestyle or anything extravagant, I would just like to be able to afford basics, like food, rent and electric bill. I am in support of paying DSP's a living wage, we do so much for many people in the community. All we are asking is for a living wage to meet the necessities of life, without feeling embarrassed or shamed for asking for help.

All in all, please consider increasing pay for DSP's, we do so much for the people we support and make so many positive improvements to their lives. DSP's can't help individuals if we are struggling to survive! Thank you

Cari Shaw