



April 4, 2025

Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderrama, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Amber Myre, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Living Opportunities, a nonprofit organization based in Medford that has partnered with the State of Oregon since 1974 to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to live, work, and thrive in their communities. I am writing today in strong support of including funding increase for ODDS services, and to urge you to include in the Department of Human Services (ODHS) budget:

1. Full funding for Direct Support Professional (DSP) wages,
2. Annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) tied to inflation, and
3. Implementation of the 2025 DHS Rate & Wage Study recommendations.

Our organization employs over 150 DSPs who provide daily support to individuals with I/DD in their homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods. This is not minimum wage work. These professionals administer medications, assist with mobility and communication, support job training and mental health care, and are often the only consistent support system in a person's life.

Despite the intensity and complexity of their work, many DSPs earn less than employees in fast food or retail because our reimbursement rates haven't kept up. In fact, ODDS currently reimburses providers an average of \$17.81/hour, yet we pay our DSPs averaging over \$20/hour—because it's what the job demands. But we can't sustain that alone.

The 2025 DHS Rate & Wage Study identified a \$558 million funding gap to stabilize the DSP workforce and recommended a minimum wage of \$25/hour. We know we can't get there today but need effort made to decrease this crisis level gap! This level of investment is not a luxury—it is a necessity to ensure service continuity, reduce staff turnover, and preserve the quality and safety of care.

We also urge you to build in an annual inflator (COLA) for DSP wages and benefits. As minimum wage rises automatically each year, the wages of those doing some of Oregon's

hardest and most vital work must not fall further behind.

Living Opportunities and organizations like ours cannot simply raise prices. We rely entirely on the funding you approve to provide these services. Without action, the I/DD system will continue to erode, leaving individuals without the support they need to remain safe, healthy, and included in their communities.

Thank you for your leadership, and for prioritizing the well-being of Oregonians with I/DD and the DSPs who support them.

Sincerely,

Amber Myre
Chief Executive Officer
Living Opportunities
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