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Dear Senate Committee on Human Services:

My name is Pam Ring, and I am the executive director for The Arc Lane County, a nonprofit dedicated to providing supports and services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 1197, which aims to expand respite services for caregivers of young people (aged 25 and under) who face complex behavioral health challenges, including mental health conditions and substance use/addiction, as well as those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In 2023, The Arc Lane County was awarded a grant by the Lane County System of Care specifically to provide respite care for children experiencing developmental disabilities, mental health, and behavioral health concerns. To date, we have been able to support over 294 children and their siblings through this vital program.

Our experience has shown that respite services play a crucial role in strengthening Oregon families by providing enriching experiences that allow young people to develop valuable social-emotional skills. Through our programs, we have witnessed transformative moments where neurotypical youth learn from their neurodiverse peers, fostering an environment of diversity, social acceptance, and inclusion.

The benefits of respite extend beyond the children; they significantly impact parents as well. Caregivers of children with exceptionalities face unique challenges that can be incredibly demanding. Respite care provides them with the necessary time to recharge and practice self-care, thereby enhancing their ability to support their children effectively. Having personally navigated the challenges of parenting a neurodiverse child, I can affirm the necessity of respite in maintaining balance and well-being in the lives of caregivers.

Through SB 1197, we have a unique opportunity to enhance the quality of life for both children and their families in Oregon. This proposed legislation will not only offer much-needed support for caregivers but also promote family unity and stability within our communities.

I strongly urge you to support SB 1197 to help keep Oregon families together and thriving. Thank you for considering this important initiative that stands to make a significant difference in the lives of many.

Sincerely,

Pam Ring, Executive Director
The Arc of Lane County