

April 3, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services  
Oregon State Capitol: 900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97302  
Re: testimony on ODHS Budget

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

We speak today for Oregon's 25,000+ workers under the Oregon Homecare Commission (OHCC)—Homecare Workers (HCWs), Personal Support Workers (PSWs), and Personal Care Attendants (PCAs)—who perform the vital, often invisible work of keeping seniors and people with disabilities living independently in their homes. Unfortunately, consistent challenges are making this work harder and threatening this vital program: bureaucratic and slow systems are pushing workers out; the inability to find workers is impacting families and people who rely on services; and we are unprepared for massive demographic changes on the horizon.

It often feels like this is a system that is designed to fail us.

**1. Bureaucracy Is Actively Pushing Workers Out:** We do this work out of love and necessity—but constant challenges are holding us back:

- **Background checks take months.** Independent providers (IPs) cannot work unless we have a background check. New workers can wait weeks or even months to get through the state's system, meaning they are left waiting with no pay and no ability to seek work.
- **No HR support:** When we have problems like late or partial pay, navigating when a client or consumer is hospitalized, paying our taxes – there is no one place for us to call. We are often passed from person to person, and if someone's primary language isn't English, it's even worse. Already understaffed and under-resourced, Local Offices, Brokerages, and CDDPs are forced to triage workforce crises they were never designed to handle, compounding burnout for both state employees and our workforce.
- **Credentialing confusion:** Multiple provider numbers, overlapping certifications, and background check communications or delays mean one missed email—often lost in spam—can terminate our livelihoods overnight.
- **EVV Compliance Challenges:** We are required to use electronic visit verification (EVV), but when our area has no broadband for EVV, it can lead to someone losing their job for inaccurate timesheets.

- **Professional Development Challenges:** We want to learn and grow our skills, but less than 5% earn Professional Development Certificates due to confusing portals, registration caps, and lack of marketing.
- **Unprotected transitions:** When consumers enter the hospital or pass away—events we can neither predict nor prevent—we instantly lose our income. Unlike any other workforce, we're left with no transitional support.

**2. Increasing Demand:** More and more Oregonians are accessing services, which is great. But demand – especially services for aging adults - is expected to increase dramatically by 2030, with an estimated 10,000 more caregivers needed to meet the dilemma in Oregon. Due to high turnover, an aging workforce, and increasing demand, estimates show that we likely need to recruit, hire, and train closer to 65,000 more care providers to keep up, and Oregon is not ready. This is why we have advocated for:

- **Recruitment:** We believe the state needs to treat this program like any other employer and aggressively recruit the workforce needed to meet the growing demand. We want to see real dollars put into marketing and recruiting new workers.
- **Retention:** People are more likely to stay when they feel supported, when they have access to quality training, when they are fairly compensated, and when they can see a future in the work.
- **Respite:** Especially for family caregivers, finding respite is nearly impossible. We believe there needs to be better systems and incentives in place to support families in finding respite care, including tools like Carina that help match workers and those who need care or support.

**3. Impacts to Oregonians:** When workers can't afford to stay, our clients and consumers pay the price:

- **Gaps in care** due to the inability to find a worker, slow background checks, and more can lead to hospitalizations, they can destabilize people who then can't afford to stay in their homes, and it can impact Oregonians' ability to live independently in their own community.
- **Rural deserts:** When mileage reimbursement doesn't reflect the true scope of our support, it's workers who pay that cost so that consumers aren't left in the lurch.
- **A lack of a workforce recruitment plan** means that Oregon is not prepared to recruit and retain the workers we need to meet the growing demand.

Voices from the Frontlines:

- Cristal DeJarnac (SEIU Local 99 President): *"4,000 workers fled to agencies in five years—not just for higher pay, but to escape the state's chaos. Meanwhile, clients languish without care."*
- Diana Evens (Homecare Council VP): *"When my background check stalled, my client went 3 weeks without showers."*

### **What we are asking for:**

1. **More on-the-job support** for pay issues, credentialing, EVV support, and more.
2. **Expedited background checks** or opportunities for supervised work for IPs while they wait. This includes supporting House Bill 4122 to implement Rap Back in Oregon.
3. **Universal provider numbers** to support portability and provide a streamlined process for tracking our hours, pay, training, background checks, and more.
4. **Language justice** for all workers. Accurate, timely translations of critical forms.
5. **Implement Agency with Choice:** Provide an alternative option for workers who want to provide self-directed services without the burdens of the State's bureaucracy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In it together,

SEIU Local 503 Homecare Council, Sublocal 99 Executive Leadership:

Cristal DeJarnac

Diana Evens

Patty Falkenstein

Steve Shumate

Loril Eaton