



April 3, 2025

SB 5526

Co-Chairs Campos, Valderrama and members of the committee,

My name is Lorelei LaVoie, I serve as Board President of the Community Providers Association of Oregon (CPAO) and am the Executive Director of OMRS, a non-profit that provides a variety of services to individuals who experience intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. I started at the organization 29 years ago as a Direct Support Professional.

I am here today advocating for significant investments in our funding model. As you know, costs have increased rapidly while we have been waiting for the completion of the rate and wage study. Providers have been running on fumes trying to keep competitive wages and maintain meaningful benefits. We need immediate stabilization of our workforce, the current status quo is NOT sustainable. We cannot provide quality support with the ongoing rapid turnover of our valuable and skilled Direct Support PROFESSIONALS. I emphasize the term "PROFESSIONALS" because their roles require them to build a broad skillset of knowledge to deliver the individualized and often complex supports they provide. Long-term DSPs and frontline supervisors are critical in the quality of services being delivered. It takes time to build their skills and knowledge base, it takes full staffing for them to have the time or energy to participate in professional development. This can't happen if we keep burning people out, expecting them to ensure the needs of those they get to serve are met- all the while, not compensating them fairly enough to meet their very own basic needs. You can't help others if you don't put the O2 mask on yourself first, yet, that's exactly what DSPs are expected to do.

When one is living in such chaos, unable to meet their own needs, there will be a turning point where they have to change the pattern in order for the cycle to stop. Leaving an important and meaningful career as a DSP. Unfortunately, this leads to vacant positions that must be covered, which means we are now asking others to cover extra shifts and burn themselves out, losing even more quality professionals. Frontline supervisors get worn out, then we have high turnover at that level, it's no surprise if a front-line supervisor is burnt out they will likely continue to lose staff and the cycle perpetuates over and over. Pretty soon, lean admin teams are filling in the gaps and agencies, like my own, are spread so thin, we can't keep the cogs in the wheels moving forward. We need to be made whole- so we can take good care of those we employ.... so they can take good care of those they get to serve.



Think of the loss and grief individuals we have the honor to serve feel each time a DSP who understands their needs leaves, DSPs who've demonstrated they will show up, they can be trusted...until they have to make a change in order to meet their own basic human needs. I have such gratitude for the grace those we serve extend to us, trusting OVER AND OVER AND OVER. Imagine who you want there to support you on your worst day? Someone who knows you so well they can offer the exact thing you need without you having to ask for it, right? Not someone you met yesterday.

Individuals and their families put a lot of faith in providers, it's not a responsibility we take lightly.

There's much work to be done moving Oregon's services forward, providers are eager to collaborate with ODDS and be good partners in service delivery- without investment in our services, we won't have the bench strength to do this well. We must be made whole, continuing to kick the can down the road will only increase the already ginormous funding gap.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lorelei LaVoie', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Lorelei LaVoie

CPAO Board President

OMRS Executive Director