

## **Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,**

My name is Lenore Eklund, and I'm a resident of Portland and the parent of an eight-year-old daughter, Charlee, who has complex medical needs. She uses a wheelchair, is non-verbal, requires a g-tube for nutrition, and needs full assistance for daily activities.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, I was hired as Charlee's caregiver. With the ongoing healthcare worker shortage, I wasn't just filling a gap—I was providing consistent, specialized care that reduced emergency interventions and improved her quality of life. In the two years I was paid for her care, Charlee never had an ER visit, saving the state an estimated \$72,000. Since the program ended, the constant turnover of caregivers has caused her distress, self-harm, and setbacks in her development.

Oregon has promised children like Charlee access to in-home care rather than costly institutional placements, but for over a decade, these services have been impossible to fully utilize. By refusing to recognize parents as paid caregivers, the state is failing to provide the care these children are already entitled to.

This isn't about politics—it's about common sense. Paying parents for the care they already provide is a cost-effective solution that ensures children receive the consistent, high-quality care they need while stabilizing families. The COVID-19 allowance proved that this model works. We saw healthier, happier children making real progress.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 538 and remove the ban on paying parents as caregivers. Fund the kids, not the system. Thank you for your time.