

Submitter: Jonathan Jenka
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Testimony in Support of HB 5006

Oregon State Legislature – Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Jonathan Jenka– Willamette Vocational Resource Community

Date: April 18, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 5006. My name is Jonathan Jenka, the Vocational Services coordinator at Willamette Vocational Resource Community (WVRC). We are a nonprofit organization based in Oregon that provides individualized employment and community integration services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We support clients across the Willamette Valley—including Albany, Corvallis, Lebanon, and Sweet Home—helping them gain meaningful employment, develop skills, and build independence through hands-on training, advocacy, and person-centered planning. WVRC is committed to promoting inclusion, dignity, and opportunity for all Oregonians with disabilities.

We urge the Legislature to ensure that funds allocated through HB 5006 include rate increases for provider agencies, in alignment with the findings of the recently completed Rate and Wage Study. This study confirms what many of us have known and experienced for years: current funding is significantly below what is needed to provide stable, high-quality support services, and to recruit and retain the skilled workforce our mission depends on.

Our agency has faced increasing challenges including:

- Staff turnover is at an all-time high, driven by low wages that often cannot compete with other career options in the area. In some cases, we've lost talented, dedicated employees to employers offering just \$1–2/hour more. The current wages in our field are below the cost of living in many areas of Oregon.
- We've had to turn away referrals for essential services due to staffing shortages, leaving individuals and families without the support they need to live and work in their communities. For example, not enough staff to support individuals in wheelchairs on excursions.
- We strive to keep our services community-based and personalized, but rising transportation and travel costs have made it increasingly difficult to maintain this standard without proper funding. This also includes updating our fleet of vehicles, but the rising cost of accessible vehicles requires far more funding.

The Rate and Wage Study provides a data-driven, transparent picture of what it truly costs to deliver these essential services—and the gap is undeniable. We cannot ignore the consequences of underfunding: burnout, turnover, service cuts, and missed opportunities for the Oregonians we serve. As mentioned, holding onto dedicated and motivated employees is difficult without being able to provide a competitive wage. I love what I do and I work hard to improve the lives of the individuals I support to find employment in the community. However, I would also like to start a family and eventually own a home. The current funding make this a distant/impossible reality, meaning I may have to find employment that pays a higher rate, yet will not help the people that are most vulnerable in our beautiful state

Including funds for rate increases in the allocations authorized by HB 5006 is not just a budget decision—it's a commitment to equity, stability, and quality care for vulnerable Oregonians. We ask for your leadership in recognizing this need and acting on the study's recommendations.

Thank you for your time and service to the people of Oregon.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Jenka
Vocational Services Coordinator
Willamette Vocational Resource Community