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Testimony in Support of Increased IDD Funding in the 2025–27 DHS Budget

Co-Chairs Leiber and Sanchez, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of increased funding for services that support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). My name is Carrie Howell, and I represent Chamberlin House Inc., a 24-hour residential services provider in Albany, Oregon.

Increased Investment

We urge you to support an investment in IDD services in Oregon for the 2025-27 budget to address the \$558 million gap in provider reimbursement rates. The DHS Wage & Rate Study, commissioned by the legislature, has provided a precise figure that clearly illustrates the disparity between what the state reimburses and the actual costs of delivering high-quality services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

This figure is not merely a statistic; it represents decades of chronic underfunding and underscores the urgent need to invest in this vital workforce. Without decisive action from legislators to help close this gap, we are facing a critical crisis that threatens the stability and quality of care for those we support.

Current Challenges

Currently, providers across Oregon are struggling to survive. Costs continue to rise, yet we cannot independently increase rates or wages. As a result, service disruptions, high staff turnover, and reduced access to care have become commonplace for the individuals we support. These individuals require consistent, high-quality care to live safely and with dignity.

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) Deserve Better

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are the backbone of our system, playing a crucial role in supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). They provide essential, skilled, and often demanding care, assisting individuals in their homes, workplaces, and communities. Despite their significant contributions, DSPs are compensated at levels that are far below what is necessary for sustainable living.

The Need for Competitive Compensation

To remain competitive in the job market, especially compared to fast-food and retail employers, we are currently paying DSPs approximately \$4.50 more per hour than the state's reimbursement model allows, which is \$19.50/hour. This discrepancy means we are stretching every dollar just to offer wages that barely compete with entry-level positions. Such a situation is not sustainable and jeopardizes the quality of care that individuals with IDD receive.

Consequences of Inadequate Funding

When DSPs leave due to low wages and lack of support, the individuals they serve suffer immensely. Constantly adjusting to new staff disrupts the continuity of care, undermining the progress and well-being of those with complex needs. Additionally, high turnover rates and increased burnout among current staff lead to a shrinking hiring pool, making it increasingly difficult to attract and retain the qualified professionals needed for quality care.

Call to Action

It is essential for legislators and stakeholders to recognize the critical role that DSPs play in our communities. By advocating for increased funding and reimbursement rates, we can ensure that DSPs receive fair, livable wages that reflect the significant responsibilities they undertake. Investing in this workforce is not just about supporting DSPs; it is about providing individuals with IDD the consistent, high-quality care they deserve.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I implore you to consider the ramifications of continued underfunding in IDD services. By investing in this vital sector, we can ensure that individuals with IDD receive the quality care they deserve and that providers can sustain their operations and workforce. Together, we can take meaningful steps toward closing the funding gap and supporting our most vulnerable community members.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.



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