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On Behalf Of: Living Opportunities
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

At Living Opportunities, over 140 dedicated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) provide essential daily care and life-enriching support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) — in homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods across our community. This is skilled, life-sustaining work — not minimum wage labor. DSPs are the consistent lifeline for the people we serve, offering around-the-clock care 24/7/365.

These professionals do far more than provide basic care: they administer medications, assist with mobility and communication, perform nurse-delegated tasks, and support individuals with job training, housing navigation, and mental health needs. Yet the current state reimbursement rate models their wages at only \$18.77/hour — a number that is far below what is needed to sustain and grow this vital workforce.

To retain even a basic level of staffing, Living Opportunities pays an average of \$21.37/hour — starting at \$18.50 — which still fails to compete with fast food, drive-through coffee stands, and retail jobs that offer similar or even higher wages with far less responsibility.

A recent DHS Rate & Wage Study identified a \$558 million gap in funding needed to stabilize the DSP workforce and recommended a fair average wage of \$23.20/hour. We understand this can't be achieved overnight — but we must begin closing this gap now to protect the future of Oregon's I/DD system.

This investment is not a luxury — it's a necessity. Without it, we face dangerously high staff turnover, inconsistent care, and the risk of losing the skilled professionals who are often the only stable presence in the lives of those we serve.

We also urge the legislature to support an annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for DSP wages and benefits. With Oregon's minimum wage increasing again in July, the gap between minimum wage and DSP wages will widen by another \$0.35 unless action is taken. Bills like HB 2150-2 and SB 133 are crucial steps in addressing this growing disparity.

Providers like Living Opportunities cannot raise prices to cover wage increases — we rely entirely on the funding you authorize. Without your action, the I/DD support system will continue to erode, and the consequences will be felt by some of Oregon's most vulnerable residents.

We ask you to act — invest in the people who make this care possible. Recognize DSPs for the essential workers they are, and fund the wages that reflect their value.

Thank you for your leadership and for standing with Oregonians with I/DD — and with the professionals who help them thrive.