



Testimony in support of SB 238 – Direct Support Professional (DSP) Wages

February 14, 2017

Dear Chair Gelser and Members of Senate Committee on Human Services,

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs (AOCMHP), we would like to express our support for SB 238, requiring DHS to pay 150 percent of minimum wage for direct service professionals who are employed by agencies that provide comprehensive services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), and to provide training to this important workforce.

AOCMHP's membership includes 32 Community Developmental Disability Programs (CDDPs) across Oregon, who are responsible for monitoring services and assuring the protection and safety of Oregonians with I/DD living in 24-hour residential support settings.

Service Coordinators who develop individual service plans have become increasingly concerned as they see agency providers struggling to recruit and retain staff. Turnover has increased, creating a lack of continuity for the individuals living in the homes and making it more challenging to monitor their plans.

There is a decreased capacity of 24-hour residential programs and provider agencies are closing exclusively due to lack of staffing. Homes may be down to one trained agency staff, and are hiring temporary workers to fill in all the other shifts, using the one agency staff to train/support the temp staff. This leaves very little time to have actual direct contact with the individuals living in the home.

There is also an increase in abuse allegations at some homes due to the lack of DSP staff. When agencies are down multiple staff, they are unable to provide the necessary supports to their residents. This puts individuals at health and safety risks. Providers are giving notice, choosing not to serve or to even take referrals for individuals in crisis who need immediate placement. The outcome is that individuals with I/DD remain in hospitals, jails, and psychiatric units much longer than necessary.

Direct support professionals are critical to the care and quality of life of individuals with I/DD, some who need ongoing medical care and mental health supports. A well-trained, well-paid workforce is essential to assure individuals with I/DD live a full and inclusive life in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of increasing wages for DSPs in SB 238.

Sincerely,

Cherryl L. Ramirez
Director, AOCMHP