

Testimony of
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Provided to
The Senate Committee On Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

In Support of
Senate Concurrent Resolution 15
Honoring pilots and volunteers of Oregon Wing of Angel Flight West for service to people of this
state

Chairman Boquist, committee members, I am Joe Pelissier, a resident of Hillsboro, a Command Pilot and the Chief Orientation Pilot for the Oregon Wing of Angel Flight West. I am here today in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 15.

I am pleased to talk to you today about the pilots who volunteer for Angel Flight West.

As Rosemary stated, we currently have 70 volunteer Command Pilots in the Oregon Wing. But what exactly is a Command Pilot? Technically speaking, a Command Pilot is an FAA certified pilot who meets the experience criteria set forth by Angel Flight West to command Angel Flight Missions, and whose qualifications have been verified and has undergone training on Angel Flight West operational and safety procedures by one of our volunteer Mission Orientation Pilots.

Our Command Pilots are representative of the entire cross-section of Oregonians: we have Pilots that include a successful internet entrepreneur, a Mennonite grass seed farmer, small business people, and most every other background one might imagine. Some are able to conduct dozens of missions per year, while others save their money to perform a single mission. The aircraft that our pilots provide are all FAA certified and range from simple two and four seat single engine piston aircraft to small jet aircraft.

But despite this diversity, our Command Pilots have one thing in common: a drive to utilize their unique skills to help our fellow citizens in need.

Some of our Command Pilots have volunteered to assist the Oregon Wing beyond flying missions. We have several experienced Command Pilots that have received additional training to act as Mission Orientation Pilots. These pilots work with our new pilot volunteers to ensure they are prepared to act as Command Pilots. In addition, we have Mentor Pilots that volunteer to assist new Command Pilots in obtaining and conducting their first mission.

I personally have been the Command Pilot on over 100 Angel Flight missions. I could spend hours discussing the incredible people that I have met on this journey, but in the interest of time, I would like to briefly tell you about one amazing Oregon family.

In the summer of 2006 Stacy and Jason Bingham received the terrifying news: at the age of six, their oldest daughter Sierra had experienced congestive heart failure. She was rushed to Stanford hospital in California where she was placed on the waiting list to receive a new heart, while her own heart rapidly deteriorated. Fortunately, a heart became available and was successfully transplanted into Sierra. In the intervening years, Sierra has needed to travel extensively between Baker City and Stanford hospital for follow-up visits. During one flight, Jason estimated that without Angel Flight, his travel expenses would have been in excess of \$250,000 dollars, which would have financially ruined them. They were fortunate that insurance covered their medical expenses, but of course it does not cover transportation.

I wish that I could report to you the happy ending to this story; but unfortunately this is not to be the case. In May of 2012, the Bingham's third child, Lindsey, at the age of eight, was diagnosed with the same disorder as her older sister. Lindsey heart failed and she was placed on a mechanical pump. She then waited for a heart to become available, for 240 days. Finally, at 7:16am on Valentine's Day this year, Lindsey's new heart arrived. The transplant was performed and Lindsey is doing well.

We hope and pray that this story will have a happy ending, but unfortunately despite all that the family has been through, their battle is just beginning. Testing performed shortly after Lindsey's heart failure has revealed that it is likely that all five of the Bingham's children will, at some time, need a heart transplant.

While there are many amazing people involved in the care of the Bingham family, I am proud that I and my fellow Oregon Wing Command Pilots have and will continue to support this family and the countless other Oregonians who find themselves needing the help and compassion of others.

I thank you for your consideration of this resolution and for allowing me to share this information with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.