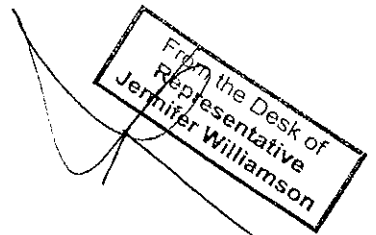


# Relating to HB 2896



March 6, 2013

Dear Members of the House of Representatives,

I am writing you in support of House Bill 2896. My name is Katie Wilkes and I live in NW Portland and am 26 years old. I was diagnosed with melanoma when I was 23 years old. The first time I used a tanning bed I was 16 years old. Like most teenagers, I was self-conscious about my appearance, especially after being teased for having "ghostly" white skin as a kid.

At first, my mom refused to let me tan. "You're beautiful the way you are," she would say, and then go on a rant about how tanning would make my skin look like leather by the time I turned 30. But no matter what she said, I hated the way I felt when I looked in the mirror. So many other girls were tanning (and comparing their tan lines during lunch period), why shouldn't I be able to do it, too?

After months of begging, my mom finally caved and I started visiting tanning salons with my friends. Many salons in Portland never even checked my ID to see if I was underage, let alone keep track of how many minutes I spent in the beds.

Tanning salons often promoted "unlimited" packages, which allowed me to tan as many times as I wanted for a set monthly fee. I frequently purchased the unlimited packages because it was more cost effective than buying individual tanning sessions. One summer, determined to get my money's worth, I tanned every single day for 30 days.

When I was 16, I was an honor roll student at Saint Mary's Academy in downtown Portland. That's part of what made tanning OK. It wasn't as bad as drinking or smoking. Even the "good girls" wanted to be tan for prom and senior portraits.

After high school, the tanning continued. I joined a sorority and made frequent trips to tanning salons with my sorority sisters. By the time I turned 18, I was tanning at least once a week, often several times more.

I never imagined I would be diagnosed with malignant melanoma, the most deadly type of skin cancer, at age 23. I found out on the third day of work at my first full-time job. Within days, I was referred to a surgical oncologist who made a three-inch, eye-shaped incision on the side of my right breast. I was lucky enough to catch my melanoma before it spread, but that's what's so scary about melanoma. It's not just skin cancer. It's unpredictable and can grow from Stage I to stage IV in a heartbeat. I continue to be haunted by anxieties that I'll develop a second melanoma. Many survivors do, and maybe I won't be so lucky next time.

At age 16, I thought I understood the risks of tanning, but who really thinks they're going to get cancer before starting their first real job? In reality, melanoma has become the most frequently diagnosed cancer for women my age—and it's not going to stop unless we do what we can to protect children from the dangers of indoor UV tanning.

My mom regrets letting me tan, but how could she have known that tanning beds were so dangerous? Many of my friends' parents still think it's smart to get a "base tan" before going on

vacation or that you need to tan to get enough vitamin D, so who can we trust to find reliable information about tanning beds? A couple years ago, I went to a tanning salon to get a spray tan (which is a safe alternative) and the tanning representative also tried to sell me on a UV tanning package even after I told them I had a history of melanoma. Just last year a tanning salon employee told me that tanning beds are so high tech these days they don't cause the "c-word" anymore. If that were true, how do you explain the cancer I developed on my chest—skin that I have never exposed to sunlight but that received hours and hours of UV exposure during my indoor tanning sessions?

I think the worst part of it is, if I had to do it all over again, I don't know if I could have done anything differently. Until our society starts to embrace pale skin as beautiful, there's nothing that will keep a 16-year-old out of a tanning bed short of a ban. By passing this bill, we have the power to make a statement that tanning beds are dangerous, and to curb the escalating rate of melanoma diagnosis in Oregon. I urge your support of House Bill 2896 today.