

TESTIMONY FOR SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HUMAN SERVICES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Melissa Haggerty and Cheryl Coon
820 SW 2nd Ave.
Portland, OR 97204

March 19, 2015

Senator Sara Gelser, Chair
Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee

Re: Melissa Haggerty and Cheryl Coon's Testimony in Support of SB 710

Dear Senator Gelser,

We appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of Senate Bill 710, a bill that would assist Oregon's most vulnerable populations in obtaining federal benefits for which they qualify.

At the heart of every Social Security disability case is medical evidence. When an Oregonian applies for Social Security disability benefits, he initially provides Social Security with a list of the health care providers he has seen. Social Security is supposed to collect those records.

But, if an applicant does not win at first (and most do not), he must obtain all future medical records, from that time on. Because it takes about two years to get to a hearing, this means an applicant must pay for two years of medical records. This can be very costly. Even under existing Oregon law that limits the cost of copies of medical records, these records can cost the average person \$200 to \$700. (ORS 192.563).

That cost is a serious burden. These are hardworking Oregonians who have fallen on difficult times because of their medical problems. They cannot afford to pay hundreds of dollars to access their Social Security disability benefits.

Senate Bill 710 would remove this financial barrier for disabled Oregonians. Eighteen states have already passed laws similar to Senate Bill 710. Oregon lags behind Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia when it comes to helping people with disabilities obtain their own medical records so they can win their claims for disability benefits.

Finally, there is no financial burden on the State of Oregon created by Senate Bill 710. In fact, helping disability applicants obtain federal disability benefits will alleviate economic burdens for Oregon; individuals who receive Social Security disability are less likely to require state assistance.

Thank you,

Melissa Haggerty and Cheryl Coon