

March 18, 2019

House Committee on Human Services & Housing – Public Hearing on HB 3122

Good afternoon, and thank you Chair Kenny-Guyer and Committee Members,

For the record, my name is Cathy Wenberg, and I live in Portland. I am here to support House Bill 3122!

I grew up with a disability in a rural community.

Having a disability, no matter when you acquire it, is a crash course in trying to navigate living in a world that doesn't understand you, and may not feel comfortable with you.

I negotiated my way through school the best I could and graduated high school. I went to college, learned to advocate for getting many of the accommodations I needed in classes, and internships.

Eventually I got a part time job. Later I went on to get a master's degree in social work.

I moved Portland in 2007 where I learned about Centers for Independent Living for the first time.

I volunteered at ILR, the CIL in Portland, for a few months. When a position became available, I applied.

I have been on many job interviews, but this was first time that having a disability was an advantage. You see CILs are the only agencies federally mandated to employ people with disabilities; a majority of the staff members at CILs must experience a disability in life. It's the basis of what makes them a unique resource for people with disabilities. CILs offer peer counseling and resources to navigate the world.

During the interview, nobody was uncomfortable with my disability; everyone was at ease, focusing on my accomplishments, and what skills and talents I would bring to the agency, instead of how I was going to need accommodation for my disabilities .

I got my LCSW while at ILR, and worked my way up after 12 years to eventually be the clinical supervisor.

I enjoy helping people of all ages, people who may have been born with a disability or who acquired it as part of the aging process. I enjoy helping people learn how to navigate a world that may not understand their disability, and I have a lot to offer because I've had to learn those same skills myself over a lifetime.

Thank you for valuing my story.