

HB2869 Testimony

Chair Reynolds and Members of the Early Childhood and Health Services Committee

Good afternoon. My name is Keren Brown Wilson and I am here to voice my support of HB 2869.

Although I am CEO of a statewide organization that works with older adults, I actually am speaking to you today as an older adult herself who will turn 75 in less than a month.

I began working with older adults as an undergraduate at the UW in Seattle. When it was time to get my PhD, I chose PSU's Institute on Aging. Not only did they offer great opportunities in applied research, Oregon was also in the midst of an exciting experimental program called the FIG Waiver project and had passed a piece of historical legislation called SB 955. Some of you might remember this project and the legislation. It became the bedrock of Oregon's support for the most frail and disadvantaged older adults and disabled persons. Today qualified older and disabled Oregonians have choices because that waiver created one of the most advanced articulated systems of LTC in the country.

I am proud to be called the mother of the Oregon model of assisted living, and for helping develop the first Medicaid funded assisted living in the US. That giant step forward showed great farsightedness by the State and its leaders. Thousands of older people, their families, and communities benefited from that momentous action nearly 40 years ago.

BUT, it was a generation ago. Now we are at another pivotal moment. Others told you about the great imminent and permanent structural change that is soon upon us. I am the face of that change. I am one of the 95+% of the older population not served by Oregon's great LTC system. I still work. I spent years providing support and care for older siblings. I have a son, 55, who likely will need and want to work at least another 20 years. I have grandchildren who have a high probability of living to 100. We must begin the work to create a multi-sector comprehensive plan for aging.

I am at the front end of a demographic shift that needs our state to once again be bold. Let us embrace our shared future. A permanently older population will change Oregon. Yes, there will be challenges ahead. But I am here to testify that there are great opportunities as well. Oregon's leadership can demonstrate farsightedness once again with the passage of HB 2869.

Keren Brown Wilson, PhD