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On Behalf Of: Or Disability Health Employment Equity Coalition
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Testimony

SB 576, Health/Service Support for Workers with Disabilities
Joint Ways and Means Committee, May 3, 2023

I'm Jim Davis, a retired gerontologist, psychologist and professor, representing the Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens, United Seniors of Oregon, and the Oregon Consumer League, all members of the Oregon Disability Health and Employment Equity Coalition, which I serve as Legislative Co-Chair.

Myself and my colleagues and fellow advocates are here to express our strong support of SB 576. During the 2021 Legislative Session, advocates submitted SB 584 to address this problem. It died in the Ways and Means Committee.

A wide range of disability advocacy and consumer groups/organizations have joined together as one through this coalition to develop and support SB 576 with our champion and chief sponsor Senator Sara Gelser Blouin. In addition to our groups, coalition partners include Oregon State Independent Living Council, Oregon Disabilities Commission, Disability Rights Oregon, Oregon State Rehabilitation Council, Health Share Oregon, Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection, and many other groups and individuals.

This legislation will allow Oregonians with disabilities to work, maintain private insurance, and remain eligible for Medicaid coverage for their health care and long-term supports and services (LTSS) needs. SB 576 would change the restrictive income and asset/resource limits for eligibility for the Employed People with Disabilities program. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) will expand the program that provides Medicaid to employed individuals with disabilities, including coordination of benefits if that person has employer-sponsored coverage, to enable access to critical health care and long term services and supports (LTSS). This gives them the opportunity to pursue career growth and success. Health and employment equity allows workers with disabilities to thrive.

Employed Oregonians with disabilities, who already face a myriad of discrimination and denial of reasonable accommodations in the workplace, often must make a tough choice. They need Medicaid for critical healthcare and in-home and community-based long term services and supports for often multiple, life-altering disabilities affecting basic functions of life; many being wheelchair bound. However,

asset and income limitations create barriers to the pursuit of career advancement opportunities. Many must forego pay raises, management opportunities, and job promotions, and may face unfortunate roadblocks to greater personal assets, all because they are at risk of losing their public benefits. Systemic barriers are suppressing financial and health security for workers with disabilities. Medicaid asset and income eligibility restrictions for employed people with disabilities limit their ability for advancement and prosperity through employment, and exposes them and their families to financial and health disparities.

Other states have already implemented similar solutions. Some states have modified their income and/or resource limits to be more generous than Oregon is to its workers with disabilities. The state of Washington has eliminated all limits to income and resources.

Through SB 576 we seek legislative solutions to obtain the Medicaid coverage workers with disabilities need, while allowing them the independence, dignity, and choice of work to earn a steady income, advance in their careers and make important contributions to their communities.

We ask for your support to integrate SB 576 into the APD/ODHS Budget and thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives on this critical issue for workers with disabilities.