



To: Joint Ways and Means Committee

From: West Livaudais, ED of Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection (www.oregonsci.org);
Disability Health & Employment Equity Coalition member (www.disabilityequitycoalition.org)

Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection requests your support for SB 576, currently in the Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee.

SB 576 will change policy in the existing Employed People with Disabilities Program that 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 will allow the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) to ignore restrictive income and asset Medicaid eligibility caps for the Employed People with Disabilities (EPD) program. This gives employed Oregonians with disabilities the opportunity to pursue career growth that supports health and well-being. Health and employment equity allows workers with disabilities to thrive.

What follows is an explicit example of how employed Oregonians with disabilities are serving their disability community as community health workers but are not being compensated with a living wage because of Medicaid asset and income eligibility restrictions

In 2013, I became paralyzed. Out of that experience I founded Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection (OSCI) to ensure every Oregonian with a spinal cord injury has the care and community they need to thrive.

A central strategy of OSCI to fulfill its mission is to employ people with spinal cord injuries as community health workers (CHW). These CHWs have lived-experience of spinal cord injury and possess an in-depth knowledge of barriers to resources and services that the community faces.

OSCI CHW Team responds to the acute needs of people living with spinal cord injury, as well as implements programs that build community. OSCI receives referrals from healthcare providers at every juncture of the healthcare delivery system, as well as from other social services organizations. The CHW Team provides intensive client case management for newly injured people or those who are not thriving. They also coordinate the community programs, including community meet-ups, adaptive hiking, camping and outdoor recreation, wheelchair maintenance workshops, and educational forums. The CHWs' work creates direct links to care and strengthens the social fabric of this community.



Unfortunately, some of our employees can't be hired full-time or paid competitive wages, even though we have funding, because of the Medicaid asset and income eligibility restriction for employed people with disabilities. This year one of our CHWs actually had to decline a cost-of-living-adjustment so as to not risk the health benefits they receive.

Effectively, this policy not only harms our employees, it restricts the organization's ability to hire qualified candidates by shrinking our employee candidate pool. Ultimately, this is hamstringing OSCI's ability to fulfill its mission. Literally, there are Oregonians with spinal cord injury that we can not reach because this policy is suppressing our growth and impact.

I'm asking you to please support SB 576. It will create employment equity for Oregonians with disabilities that ushers in new pathways to prosperity, innovation and health for Oregon's disability community.

Thank you!

West Livaudais
Executive Director
Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection