

Submitter: Anika D Souza
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB535

My name is Anika, and I am a resident of Deschutes County in Bend, Oregon and a patient advocate for FORCE. FORCE (Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering the millions of individuals and families facing hereditary cancers. Its community includes people with BRCA, ATM, PALB2, CHEK2, PTEN, or other inherited gene mutations. As a patient advocate, my goal is to share my story to support legislation that would benefit the hereditary cancer community. I am writing this testimony in support of SB 535 and to urge my representatives to pass this legislation that would enable men and women effected by hereditary cancer to start families using the innovations of modern medicine.

For those with inherited genetic mutations that predispose them to cancer, risk-reducing surgeries including the removal of ovaries and reproductive organs provide a means to a healthy, cancer-free life. Many find out about their mutation as young adults before they start families, and fertility-preserving treatments allow them to mitigate their cancer risks while also enjoying the right to start a family when they choose. Additionally, for those diagnosed with cancer as young adults before starting families, chemo and other cancer treatments may impact their ability to have children later in life; fertility treatments protect their ability to later have children. However, many young adults are underinsured, and without insurance coverage, many individuals cannot afford fertility preservation and treatments, curtailing their dream of ever having biological children.

As a young adult with BRCA1, I frequently think about my options for starting a family and what my future would look like should I choose to have a risk-reducing surgery. I am lucky enough that the health insurance through my current employer covers some treatments, such as egg retrieval, but I worry that should I change jobs, I will no longer be able to afford that option. SB 535 would ensure that me and thousands of other Oregonians affected by hereditary cancers are able to start a family.

I thank you for this chance to advocate for this landmark bill and join other states that protect citizen's rights to start a family.

Anika D., Patient Advocate Leader
Bend, Oregon