

Submitter: Brittny Anderson
On Behalf Of: Tensy's Law SB 538
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Britt Anderson, and I am here today to support Senate Bill 538, Tensy's Law, to remove the ban on paying parents as care workers for severely disabled children.

My six-year-old son, Nathanael, is profoundly autistic with complex medical needs. He is already approved for 20 hours per week of paid care, but because of the ban on parent caregivers, we are only able to access a fraction of the hours he is entitled to. We are currently approved and on a waitlist for paid parent caregiving that is over 1000 people long. This is inadequate and unacceptable. In the meantime, quality home care is hard to find, difficult to schedule, and often falls woefully short of our children's needs – sometimes with devastating effects.

The care I provide Nathanael goes way beyond normal parenting responsibilities. For the past four years, I have received intensive training across multiple modalities to learn how to navigate his complex needs. I have had to walk away from the workforce entirely, missing out on income, health insurance, and retirement benefits just to care for my son. His needs are so extensive that I am, truly, unemployable. But there is a paying job that exists and that I can do but which is not available to me – caring for Nathanael. The job I dedicate myself to every day, unpaid.

When Nathanael is in my care, he is less likely to engage in potentially dangerous or even life-threatening behavior than when he is with an outside caregiver. There is also the ever-present worry about abuse or neglect when he is not in my care. My son would not be able to tell me if he was being mistreated. I have experienced the heartache of him coming home from outpatient clinics with unexplained bruises and welts. I have experienced the panic from him eloping from a caregiver and being found wandering a busy parking lot just a few yards from an open canal in which he easily could have drowned. Don't just take my word for it. Parents reported that their children were happier, healthier, and made meaningful gains during the Covid-era stay on the paid parent caregiver ban. Also consider that it is immensely cost-effective to pay parent caregivers rather than pay for much more expensive institutional and out-of-home placements. Again, this is care that they are already entitled to.

This is common sense. Oregon has taken steps in the right direction, but we need Tensy's Law to remove outdated barriers and to fulfill our promises. You have a chance to keep families together, provide children with the care they have already

been promised by the State of Oregon, and rightfully recognize parents as members of the care-giving workforce. This bill could literally lift families like mine out of poverty. But more importantly, this bill could literally save lives.

Thank you for your time.