

April 17, 2025

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Co-Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, Smith, and Esteemed Members of the Legislative Ways and Means Committee:

I am grateful that you give all Oregonians the chance to provide public input on Oregon's next budget as you prioritize critical service needs. Budget deliberations will be especially daunting given uncertainty about future revenue, especially the federal dollars that support our health and human service programs.

I am writing to urge each of you to make SB 20 a high priority. This modest bill would "tweak" a successful program operated by our Department of Human Services: *Employed Persons with Disabilities (EPD)*. EPD is a Medicaid Buy-In program that allows those with disabilities to regain their dignity through work, while maintaining critical health care and caregiving services.

Our son David fell rock-climbing in 2017 and has worked tirelessly over the past eight years to regain lost functional capacity, return to employment, transition to living on his own, and to a life that most of us without disability take for granted. Some of you may know us from our advocacy for SB420 during the 2023 Session. We thank you for your support in creating Oregon's new Brain Injury Office in DHS.

Two months ago, Dave lost his health insurance when his father retired. He recently moved into his own apartment near our home, but his expenses make it difficult for him to afford insurance. He currently works very part-time as a sales associate at REI. His primary goal is to move toward full-time employment in the future. He was grateful to learn from a friend that he might be eligible for Medicaid through the *EPD program*. He applied and recently learned that he is eligible for the program for a year. But he was disappointed that maintaining eligibility will require him to meet income (\$36,000/year) and asset (\$5000 in savings) limitations that keep him from working more and taking steps toward long-term financial independence. Dave refers to these restrictions as a "poverty trap". Because of the income and asset caps, a program that is designed to encourage folks to return to work, does exactly the opposite because it creates a false choice between work and health care.

SB 20 would remove income and asset caps from EPD so that disabled Oregonians who want to work can transition back to full employment. The fiscal impact of the bill would likely be offset over time by increased tax revenues associated with increased employment. The disabled community is ready and willing to help fill the workforce shortages in many areas. And it is a small price to pay for the dignity it would afford so many of them.

Interest in increasing access to Medicaid for workers with disabilities (by waiving income and asset caps) is gearing up in Legislatures across the country! There are similar bills pending currently in state legislatures in Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Mississippi, and New Jersey. See:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/disabilities-medicaid-if-buy-in-program/>

Our family joins with Oregon's Disability Health and Employment Equity Coalition to urge passage of SB 20. This is the third time the bill has been brought forward, and it is time to pass this critical safety net to get more disabled Oregonians back to work.

Grateful for all you do for Oregonians,

Kathryn Nichols

9880 SW Arborcrest Way

Portland, OR 97225