

Thank you co-chair Thompson and co-chair Greenlick, members of the committee. My name is Shirley Graham. I've lived in Portland, Oregon for about 35 years, and I've worked for the State of Oregon and have been commuting to Salem for the past 20 years. I have followed the Take Shape For program to get healthier and to help control my adult on-set diabetes.

In my 20 years as a State employee, I have seen a growing recognition of the importance of health for State workers and all Oregonians. The department that I work for has a Healthworks Committee that organizes physical activities and provides information and ongoing activities to encourage healthier employees. The Health Engagement model introduced this year is a next step in bringing awareness and accountability for individual health. Now we need the tools.

When I began the Take Shape For Life Program, I was taking medications for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and for diabetes, I was taking two kinds of oral medications and two kinds of expensive insulin. After losing 125 pounds on the program, I was able to stop taking insulin and one of the oral medications for diabetes and reduce the dosage and type of cholesterol medication. I'd like to note that the cost of the meal replacements on the Take Shape For Life program was LESS than the cost of just the Lantus insulin alone.

The potential for getting health care costs under control is here. Better health means fewer medications, fewer doctor's visits and fewer costly surgeries. There is a growing awareness of health benefits by making lifestyle changes. My co-workers want to know how to make the changes and they want to know how they can afford to make healthy choices. Many people find that the Weight Watchers program offered through PEBB works in their lifestyle and is effective. Many do not find it effective or find that it does not fit either their lifestyle or does not meet their need for individual support and encouragement. We need effective options.

My experience, and co-worker experience is that the Take Shape For Life Program is an effective option. The meal replacements meet the need for portion control, the end to hunger and to sugar addiction for many. The Habits of Health system with free personal coaching is solid education for unlearning habits of disease and learning habits of health.

I am asking for recognition of programs with a wellness approach to prevent nutrition related illnesses from even occurring. Please make this a priority for State employees and expand access for Oregonians. Recognizing Take Shape For Life as a program to be used for weight loss or health gains would be beneficial to the State.

Thank you for hearing us today.

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Addendum to Testimony of Shirley Graham –House Committee on Health Care. 2/22/2012

I started working for the State of Oregon in 1990. At that time, I hadn't been weighed in 4 years because my doctor's weight scale only weighed up to 350 lbs. Over the next 20 years, I became very busy. Through stress and neglect, I developed some more 'habits of disease'. Kids, work, and volunteer positions consumed my life and sugar fueled me. Not surprisingly, I developed high blood pressure, high cholesterol, joint pain, a loss of equilibrium (I fell frequently), and then of course, I developed adult on-set diabetes, which affected my eyesight and threatens health of my heart, liver, and kidneys.

My doctor stated that I should lose weight and exercise. There were no discussions about how to do that. He recommended that I attend a nutrition class for diabetics to help stabilize my glucose levels. I also tried Weight Watchers, The Atkins Diet, The Diabetic Diet. I could not break the sugar addiction or my cravings for bread and sweets. My on-the-go lifestyle included fast foods and unhealthy choices.

At work, my health conditions were accommodated in several ways, i.e., large desk chair to accommodate my size, a large CRT monitor to accommodate my failing eyesight, and if meeting in certain conference rooms, I brought my own chair or went early enough to claim a large enough chair. By 2005, I even had a special 'plan' for staying in the "Rescue Area" during fire drills. Pride would not let me take advantage of the Rescue Area. I made my way to the "Yellow Lot" and assembled with the rest of the division.

Four years ago, before I started the Take Shape for Life program, I had progressed to taking medications for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, two kinds of oral diabetes medications, and two kinds of insulin. Most of the medications were not 'generics' so out-of-pocket costs were high. Four years ago, I couldn't measure my waist with a standard tape measure because a 60" tape measure was too short. Four years ago, I couldn't walk half a block without finding a place to rest. Three years ago, all of that began to change because a Take Shape For Life Health Coach offered a program that I could follow, that teaches habits of health rather than leaving people helpless, hopeless, and stuck in habits of disease.

As I started losing weight, my life changed. The 125 pounds I've lost and have kept off has made a significant improvement in my health. My sleep patterns changed-- I can now sleep through the night. I can walk and swim, and work out. I am more alert and productive at work. Through my health coach and the program materials, I found a program where I could fuel my body so that my body could heal. As my weight dropped, my cholesterol levels dropped to healthy levels, my blood pressure is excellent, and my diabetes is in the healthy range. I no longer take insulin.

The Take Shape For Life Program has been life changing for me, and it's had a significant impact on avoiding health care expenses. As I get healthier, I am less of a burden on the health care system. I'm still working towards a healthy weight, and I'm participating in the new Health Engagement Model at the State.

Respectfully submitted,

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