

Heidi Esbensen
March 27th, 2019

Senate Committee on Health Care
The Honorable Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson, Chair

RE: Support for Senate Bill 887

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare,

I am writing to urge your support of Senate Bill 887. I suffer from chronic pain, fatigue, and other debilitating symptoms; I have been on opioids for the last 10 years, and even with them had a low quality of life and struggled with daily tasks in work, at home, and as a single parent. I began receiving acupuncture treatments and within months there was a substantial decrease in my regular pain levels, I then was able to decrease my pain medication use. Most importantly, this care increased my activity level and abilities to the point where I was able to live my life again with significant increase in quality and function. I stopped having to choose between normal life things: whether to work, or play with my kids; to take a walk with the dogs, or clean the kitchen. These are choices one shouldn't have to make, especially with an option that works and insurance that is supposed to cover said treatment.

I am grateful that my insurance benefit includes acupuncture. However, in the course of pursuing treatment, I have encountered barriers to care due to prior authorization requirements. Given the time it takes to submit this prior authorization request and obtain approval from my insurer, I have had to put off and cancel treatments, or pay out of pocket even though I had coverage according to my insurance. When I could not get approval or afford to cover out of pocket costs I had to cut treatments. Without it, my life quality quickly decreased, my pain levels quickly increased, as did my use of pain medication again. My kids were once again left with a parent that couldn't play as much, one who was not only struggling with the relapse into high pain and decreased abilities to live life, but also one who was now facing issues with coping mentally and emotionally knowing what life could be like for us with acupuncture treatments that were so clearly working! All the time spent with paperwork and battles with insurance were exhausting, and due to my chronic pain condition and the realities of a busy lifestyle, this has presented a real barrier to accessing effective treatments and maintaining a newly discovered quality of life with less pain medication.

SB 887 would help address this issue by allowing patients like me to more easily access their acupuncture benefit. SB 887 would allow me to receive initial evaluation and up to 6 acupuncture treatments up to the maximum number allowed under the plan benefit for each episode of care. If additional treatments are needed, the insurer could require a prior authorization.

This bill would allow me to receive the treatment I need in a timely manner. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Heidi Esbensen