

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 700.

My name is Jana K. Mitchell, a Community Health Worker (CHW) with Lifeways, Inc. serving Umatilla County. I wish to voice strong support for Senate Bill 700. Senate Bill 700 is vital to remove gaps and barriers to care and services for individuals with traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

Individuals with TBI experience a complex blend of physical, sensory, cognitive, behavioral, and psychological challenges that defy easy categorization, making it difficult for them to access coordinated, culturally sensitive services, and staff trained to serve their unique needs on an ongoing basis.

The following is an example of one such case: An approximately 50-year-old man with TBI sought services through Lifeways in January 2020. The client faced numerous obstacles. They include lack of housing, no income, or the ability to work, inability to qualify for Social Security Disability (SSI), lack of medical insurance, and the need for TBI diagnoses, assessment, and referral.

The client's TBI event happened in a car crash when he was a young adult. The TBI caused memory impairment and he was unable to recall services, providers, locations, and dates of care. Ultimately it was determined that he never received treatment for his TBI. Together we developed a plan that included: obtaining Oregon Health Plan Coverage, completing the SSI application and its appeal, referral to a Primary Care Provider with expertise treating individuals with TBIs for screening and assessment, attending all medical appointments together, glasses, vision and physical therapy, speech and memory therapy, applying and being granted benefits with the Umatilla County Developmental Disabilities Program, applying and obtaining housing grants, food benefits, and utilizing mental health and psychiatric services.

In November 2020, the client found housing. After moving in, he struggled to live independently. He had a short stay at an inpatient mental health facility and returned to short term transitional housing. On March 8, 2021, he will move into an adult foster home for individuals with developmental disabilities. This individual would not have been able to navigate Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Primary Care services without ample support and intervention.

Other individuals with TBI also face lack of adequate education and training about TBI, lack of standardized screening and diagnostic protocols, complex and siloed service networks, challenges with cooccurring mental health disorders and addictions, and lack of adequate vocational training and employment opportunities.

Senate Bill 700 establishes a statewide program of care coordinators specifically trained to serve individuals with TBIs and their family members across cultures and age ranges, who will assist them in navigating resources, services, supports and benefits and maintain regular contact. The bill also provides service coordination, skills training, resource facilitation for individuals with TBI, and community education to increase understanding of TBIs.

I respectfully applaud the wisdom of Senator Knopp for sponsoring this legislation and urge this Senate to support Bill 700. Individuals with TBI need access to coordinated, culturally sensitive services, and staff trained to serve their unique needs on an ongoing basis. This case and information in this testimony clearly demonstrates the necessity to pass Senate Bill 700.

Sincerely, Jana K. Mitchell, Community Health Worker
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