

Statement of Jay Housgard in support of SB 700

I suffered a life-altering, severe traumatic brain injury in 2019 after I fell and hit my head on concrete. I was hours from death. I was in the ICU for five days and spent six days in a rehabilitative hospital. Upon my release from the hospital, I felt completely lost. I lived alone, and was sent away with a mountain of paperwork and brain and eye exercises to work through. I had trouble focusing, remembering, and balancing as I walked. Soon, I began receiving all of the bills and insurance documents. I was overwhelmed, confused, anxious, and terrified of falling again. There was no one to call for support or answers. Would my brain get looked at again? Was I safe to ride on a bus? Were there support groups nearby I could go to? Was I getting better? When could I return to work? Were there financial assistance programs to help with the bills? I did not know who was going to look at my brain and continue to monitor my progress. I did not have a point person to follow up with, and the nightmare of isolation and confusion was unlike anything I had ever experienced. Although the staff in the hospitals were incredibly kind and supportive during my time there, after my release, there was no one who seemed to understand or care about my recovery and no one to turn to for all my questions.

With time, I began to try to advocate for myself, reviewing all of my paperwork, calling my doctor, and finding the number for a social worker. The brief conversation I had with a Kaiser nurse and social worker was exactly what I needed. Someone who asked "How are you" and listened patiently to help provide information about what is normal, that I was going to be okay, and to help me find resources for support. I cried tears of joy when I spoke to her. I wish this support had been available regularly, with someone checking in on me, offering help.

Months after the injury, I was fortunate to be able to return to my position at Cascade AIDS Project. I spent two years in the role of Bilingual Benefits Navigator, which helped those living with HIV with resource facilitation and patient advocacy. I continued to see the tremendous need for roles like these. Having a point person who you feel comfortable with, who provides person-centered, trauma-informed care, and who can listen and help provide answers on where to turn. I provided support for insurance and healthcare related questions, and also supported clients with other medical and basic needs guidance. I continuously worked to broaden my knowledge of available resources so that when clients reached out in need of housing, food assistance, healthcare specialists, tax preparation services, or other community supports, I could work with them to get the help they needed. I know that having Brain Injury Resource Facilitation in Oregon can help change the lives of those who need it most, and I support SB 700 to help improve health outcomes.

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