

May 18, 2021

TO: House Health Care Committee
FR: Justin Olson, Portland, OR
RE: In Support of SB 764-A

My name is Justin Olson, and I am submitting testimony in support of SB 764-A. My primary experience with prescriptions has been through being a caretaker for my mother. She has a long history of illness and is currently unable to work, and is on a fixed income and state assistance for her healthcare, housing, and food. She is in the middle of battling three types of breast cancer, as well as chronic illness she has been fighting most of her adult life. While she attempts to take care of as much of it as she is able to without prescription or over the counter medication (such as healthy alternatives, dieting, etc.) those options only help so much and unfortunately there are a lot of medication needs that she has.

With what little health care she has, and through many periods of her life without healthcare, or with healthcare plans available that were next to worthless at best or predatory at worst, I have had to help her financially throughout much of my life, and a big part of that is in paying for prescriptions - prescriptions that without access to she would die. And because prescriptions, even with various health insurances, are more often than not prohibitively expensive if you are not well off to begin with, the cost I have had to help with has been substantial.

Even in situations where there are off-brand or generic options, and at times where her health insurance was able to offer partial help, her prescriptions were still outside of her ability to afford, and I would pick up those costs. During times where she did not have health insurance, or where insurance was not able to cover the cost of medication, she would have to choose which life saving medications were a priority, because even when I was paying for it, it was still often cost prohibitive for her and I together, myself being a full-time employed, able-bodied person making well above the minimum wage. And still not able to afford necessary prescriptions. These times would see her have to completely sacrifice non-life-essential medications altogether. Those for pain management, sleep aid, any sort of anxiety management or antidepressants would be out of the question. Imagine the emotional and physical impact of invasive surgery without any way to manage your pain, without any of the few hours respite of sleep at night your body needs to heal and without any way to balance impossible, consuming feelings of despair and hopelessness that come from clinical depression and anxiety on your best days, let alone when you have been fighting a battle with multiple cancers you don't know if you can win or not.

I am happy to help my mom, and I will always do everything I can to make her days better, but she shouldn't be in a situation where the only way she can afford to have the medicine she needs to continue living is when someone else is able to afford it. If I wasn't in a position to pay for her prescriptions, she wouldn't have the medicine she needs to keep fighting, because she can't afford it, even with financial assistance, and even with health insurance. The system is not working, and the casualties are families that are just trying to survive by the most meager of means, and can't even do that.