

February 27, 2021

Dear Oregon legislators:

I am writing to ask that you support Senate Bill 584, which will require the Oregon Health Authority to provide medical assistance to employed individuals with disabilities without regard to individuals' income or resources. Everyone deserves access to the healthcare they need. Receiving healthcare should not limit your right to work or to receive deserved compensation for that work, regardless of disability status.

I have my doctorate in public health, and I teach in the public health and disability studies programs at Pacific University. My research areas include health disparities experienced by people with disabilities and access to health care for individuals with disabilities. In Oregon and across the nation, trends indicate that people with disabilities are underemployed, and that they are more likely to work part-time and earn lower average incomes than people without disabilities. Public policies - including limits on income and assets for people with disabilities to receive Medicaid benefits - contribute to this reality. To be eligible for long-term supports and services through Medicaid Buy-In, an employed Oregonian with a disability must limit their income to below 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$32,000 for a family of 1 or \$55,000 for a family of 3). This amount limits individuals with disabilities from many types of employment and opportunities for advancement. These Medicaid Buy-In eligibility requirements also limit countable assets to \$5,000, making it impossible for employed individuals with disabilities to save for the future well-being of themselves and their families.

I am also the sibling of a woman with a disability. My family has experienced the frustration over state financial limitations as requirements for participation in Medicaid. For my sister and for many with disabilities, Medicaid participation is not a choice. My sister, and many others, rely on Medicaid for necessary long-term supports and services and other forms of healthcare. In many cases, individuals with disabilities do not have alternatives for these supports, services, and coverage. Although my sister does not live in Oregon, I have numerous friends with disabilities in Oregon who encounter these limitations. Regardless of disability status, people want the freedom to work, and to achieve the highest level of employment that they merit.

It is simply an unjust act of systemic discrimination that the state of Oregon requires that people with disabilities have limited salaries and assets as a requirement of receiving needed healthcare. If we want to achieve health equity, we must allow all Oregonians the opportunity to prosper economically. Thank you for your support of Senate Bill 584.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jana Peterson-Besse".

Jana Peterson-Besse
Forest Grove, OR