

To: Senate Committee On Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery
Re: Senate Resolution 201, Honoring Kathryn Weit
From: Sharon Lewis, Portland, Oregon

February 1, 2022

Chair Gelser Blouin and Members of the Committee:

It is impossible to describe all of Kathryn Weit's contributions and achievements in Oregon, for families, for people with disabilities, and for our communities. Chair Gelser Blouin, you have done a beautiful job capturing the essence of her accomplishments in SR201, reflecting the commitment, passion, intensity and humor she brought to the work of changing systems and changing minds. I strongly support SR201, and honoring Kathryn for many, many reasons.

When my daughter Zoe was born 25 years ago and I first met Kathryn, I was just another mom who wanted to make sure my baby with a disability had the best chance to live a good life.

Kathryn told me to expect more... to do more... to be more.

As a young mom, that meant supporting advocacy for early intervention services and special education services, working on family support policy, engaging people with disabilities and families to tell their stories, and learning side by side with Kathryn. Ultimately, it led me to Washington DC, where I worked on federal disability policy, including for Congress and in multiple presidentially-appointed leadership roles. These opportunities to serve, and any positive change I contributed, would have never, ever happened without Kathryn's influence in my life -- as teacher, leader, partner, mentor, coach, and friend.

I am not alone in that – Kathryn galvanized generations of effective leaders and advocates. She embodied the idea of the ripple effect, as described by Margaret Mead – she never doubted “that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals could change the world” and she knew “that it's the only thing that ever has.”

Few in life as so fortunate to land in a force field as powerful as Kathryn's.

She was the teacher who took you under her wing and pushed you out of the nest when she knew you could fly, even if you didn't know that about yourself. And then she helped you soar.

She was the mentor who laughed with you when your daughter pee'd in your lap as you testified to the legislature, noting that it just exemplified the need for family support.

She was the passionate voice of encouragement, using a favorite expletive about ducks, when the political winds blew against you.

Kathryn was the first to celebrate the disability community's achievements... and the first to immediately think about what needed to happen next to keep pushing forward.

She was the coach who always made the time to listen to the stories, to help a self-advocate learn to speak for herself, to encourage a young parent to learn about the values of inclusion, self-determination, and high expectations.

She was the thoughtful advocate and trusted policy strategist who could also show a burning white hot temper when it came to fiercely protecting the mamas and their children.

And, Kathryn was the friend who would pick you up and help you dust off on those dark days (often with stories about how much worse it could be!)

I miss her. All the moms do. Everyone with us here today does. We are grateful to her family for sharing her with us, and we want you to know how beloved she is among us.

Her legacy is so important.

Kathryn left behind a long succession of advocates and Mothers from Hell who will not rest, until we have moved closer towards a truly just and inclusive world. A world where Colin and Molly and Zoe and Sam and Ross and Dayna and Julian and Jade and so, so, so many others -- and all who follow them -- can live healthy lives full of joy, in families and communities that know they are better for the presence and contributions of people with disabilities.

That is the gift Kathryn Weit left for all of us. I do hope that we will continue to use it well.

Thank you for your consideration of SR201.

Sharon Lewis
Portland, OR