



Oregon Council on
Developmental Disabilities

BETTER TOGETHER

February 1, 2022

To: Chair Gelser Blouin and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

From: Leslie Sutton, Executive Director, Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities

RE: SR 201 Honoring Kathryn Weit's contribution to Oregonians with Developmental Disabilities, their families and communities

Chair Gelser Blouin and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities works to create change and create leaders so that people with development disabilities (DD), their families and communities can live, learn and work together. We are led by people with DD. Two out of three of our Council members are people with DD or family members of people with DD.

For over three decades, Kathryn Weit was the Council's policy lead. She used the Council as a launch point to ensure that people with DD had access and services to truly live in their communities. With partners, she did revolutionary things like close Fairview, end waitlists for DD services, ensure that families were supported to raise their children at home and create peer-based family networks to teach families the importance of a vision and high expectations for their children with disabilities.

Kathryn never did this work alone. She poured into new and seasoned leaders with training and mentoring to ensure that they could be with her – whether they felt ready or not - as she reshaped services for Oregonians with DD and their families. The public story is that she believed in us. The real story is that she told us we were going to be leaders and we listened because we believed in her.

Like many others on our Council and in the DD community, I can often still hear Kathryn's voice reminding me of a few principles of leadership in the DD community:

- Families and Self-Advocates must lead – it is their lives we are talking about. Where are the families? Where are the self-advocates?
- Good ideas become great when others come along with you. Who is with you?
- You have a seat at the table – you better use it.
- It always goes back to the values. Where are the values? Where's self-determination? Where is community life? Where is support for families?

Finally, Kathryn firmly believed that the only way to make system change was for the entire DD Community to advocate together. Self-advocates, families, advocacy groups, providers and case management entities all must move toward the same advocacy goals. Kathryn's strategy was simple, like all people, policy makers will support us when presented with a clear united message. When you hear the DD Community is a force, think of Kathryn. She made it so.

With permission, I share the following poem for Kathryn. It was written by Tim Kral. Tim was the Executive Director of the Oregon Rehabilitation Association (now the Oregon Resource Association) during much of the time Kathryn worked for the Council.

Princess of Warriors – by Tim Kral

We suspect you were always an idealistic scrapper
But, after Colin, you became a rebel with a lifelong cause.

You found few tools in the kit you picked up
But gleefully adopted the Mother From Hell moniker
Though no money, no block of votes
And a scattered constituency consumed with caring for their kids.

You entered a fragmented field
Politicians, bureaucracy, providers, parents
Sincere in their own agendas
And somewhat cemented in their views
But you became the volatile compound
That helped us get unstuck
And then, amazingly, coalesce
Forging a force that was reckoned with.

If bravery sometimes made you brittle
So be it
The battle you took on
Demanded all your pithy weaponry
And you learned from adversaries:

'Extremism in defense of liberty for people with disabilities is no vice.
Moderation in pursuit of their justice is no virtue.'

You left a legacy, big shoes to fill
The lives of thousands are better for your work
A reservoir of strength and love
For you to dive into, to relish and savor
For sometimes there are just rewards