

Submitter: Kathryn Nichols

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB420

Chair Gelser-Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson and Members of the Committee

My name is Kathryn Nichols and I strongly support SB 420.

I come before you as the mother and a full-time caregiver of our son who sustained a severe traumatic brain injury five years ago. Before Dave's injury my husband and I were planning our retirement. We had raised our children and were excited to move out to the Gorge together and find a quieter lifestyle. But when a family member suffers a brain injury it turns the world upside down for everyone. My husband took a leave from his job so he and I could spend every day at Dave's bedside for 6 months, first in Seattle and then in Colorado where we travelled for the intensive rehab he needed.

The real work began when we returned to Portland and it was up to me to piece together a plan for Dave's ongoing recovery. I should note that I had worked for many years as a researcher and auditor in both state and local government. So I knew my way around the complexities of many of the programs that brain injury survivors might need: Unemployment, Social Security, Legal Guardianship, Medicare, Medicaid, Health Care, Behavioral Health, Insurance, Voc Rehab, and other social services. Navigating any of these systems is challenging for most of us. For those recovering from a brain injury struggling with memory, vision, and cognition, it is next to impossible.

I am happy to report that with his hard work and my navigational assistance, Dave has benefited from an array of services and supports. He is on the verge of walking, living independently, and getting back to work. Dave has progressed far beyond what any of his doctors predicted. He had spent 3 weeks in a coma and his prognosis was dire. He is the poster child for what is possible when the right services can be accessed when they are needed most. As Dave becomes increasingly independent, I can focus more attention on paying it forward. I am here today to support SB 420 for those who have not been as fortunate as Dave. And there are many, many of them in Legislative districts all over Oregon.

Prevalence statistics on traumatic brain injury underestimate actual numbers because of shortcomings in systems for assessing, diagnosing and tracking TBIs. The best numbers we have are annual hospitalizations which are reported to the CDC by the Oregon Health Authority. In 2020, 13,544 Oregonians sought care at a hospital or emergency room following a brain injury. This number does not include

those who did not seek care, or sought help from urgent care or their primary care physician. Based on the CDC's 2% prevalence rate and Oregon's current population, we estimate that over 84,000 Oregonians currently live with chronic, long-term effects of brain injury. Further, national estimates suggest a 12% lifetime prevalence rate among the general population.

The benefits of this bill reach far beyond the TBI survivors and their families. Economic studies confirm that resource navigation for this population is cost-effective. It saves far more in public resources than it costs, a benefit that serves all taxpayers in Oregon. It promotes equity by increasing access for the underserved: for people of color, those with limited economic resources, and those in rural areas. Because of the over-representation of TBI survivors among the unhoused, this bill must be part of the solution crafted by the Legislature to address the homeless crises that impacts all of us.

In closing I thank each of you for serving as a legislator to work this session to craft solutions to Oregon's pressing problems. I urge you to pass SB 420 out of committee quickly. As the bill moves forward, please encourage of all your fellow legislators in the Senate and the House to send the bill to Governor Kotek as soon as possible.

Thank you!