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To: Senate Committee on Human Services

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Subject: SB 576

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and members of the committee, I am Joseph Lowe a consumer advocate and I am here today to testify on SB 576.

SB 576 requires the Oregon Department of Human Services to administer a program to provide medical assistance to employed people with disabilities without regard to their income or resources and to allow consideration of income when determining cost-sharing for the program.

Currently, Oregon has the program known as Employed People with Disabilities or EPD. This program allows for people with disabilities to join the workforce while remaining OHP and/or Medicaid eligible by paying a participant (or “cost sharing”) fee. While employee insurances cover medical needs, it does not cover Long-Term Service and Support (LTSS) needs...OHP/Medicaid covers the LTSS needs. Seems like a great plan, right? Well, it is a great plan, and it can even be better with passage of SB 576.

As it stands now, EPD has income and resource limits on it. Once a participant surpasses those limits, they are booted from the program. This results in the loss of their OHP/Medicaid coverage for the LTSS. So, essentially Oregon is telling people with disabilities, “Yes, we support you in joining the workforce. We’ll even create this EPD program to allow you to keep your OHP/Medicaid for coverage of your LTSS needs. Oh, by the way, people with disabilities that join the workforce and starts making a substantial income must at some point decide: Go for pay raises, promotions, management opportunities, etc. BUT give up your OHP/Medicaid coverage, resulting in the loss of your LTSS needs which would likely end with losing your job too, or decline all raises, promotions, management opportunities...all equality and equity compared to our able-bodied peers, just to keep OHP/Medicaid coverage for those vital LTSS needs.” Another words,

Committee members, now that you're a legislator and making good money, we need you to decide what's more important between your health and financial stability...you can not have both so, which one is your preference? Oh, and before you make that decision, I need to remind you of the drastic inflation prices just to purchase daily life necessities...ok, now which can you give up between healthcare and financial stability? You don't want to make that decision? Well, neither do people with disabilities.

In an era of our society where equity is a huge topic, why are we still demonstrating no equity for people with disabilities? For those of us that want to join the workforce, we already experience heavy discrimination...whether it's from not being hired due to the disability, mistreated by management or peers, denied reasonable accommodations on the job site while being belittled for needing accommodations...including the reason we are all here today – an unjust, discriminating, and oppressive policy that limits employees with disabilities from ever getting into a stable financial status while maintaining good health due to having OHP/Medicaid coverage for our vital LTSS needs. So, I encourage you to help break the cycle of discrimination, oppression, and living in poverty for people with disabilities by voting to support SB 576. A vote to support SB 576 is proof that Oregon Legislators want to end an ableism system and finally bring equality and equity in employment, building a stable financial future, and maintaining good health to people with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and this opportunity today. If you have any questions, I'll try my best to answer those for you now.