

Date: February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Pete Denman

Subject: SB 576

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and members of the committee, I am Pete Denman a design researcher at Intel Corporation and I am here today to testify on SB 576.

I'm fourth generation Oregonian on both sides of my family. I've been in a wheelchair since I was 20 when I broke my neck leaving me a quadriplegic. I discovered programs that would help me get back into the workforce including vocational rehabilitation, and then later, the employed persons with disability program. When these programs were devised and put into place, they were for the intention of having people who have physical disabilities return to work and be active members of society. I use both of these programs to success, and was able to get myself back into the workforce, and despite all of the odds, I've managed to maintain a career with all of the pitfalls of being in a wheelchair.

Having a disability that requires assistance is a juggling act of:

- Trying to stay eligible for the EPD program or even just Social Security requires the person receiving these benefits to manage their money in the open and transparent way that any person auditing them will be able to understand. This means maintaining all of your receipts and bank accounts, writing down and documenting everything that you do.
- Health is a constant issue. Skin issues, bladder, infections, bowel problems, chronic pain. Everyone's list is different, but it is an ongoing battle of managing your health
- Most times people are managing their staff of caregivers. This means negotiating with department of human services for the amount of hours that you need to do everything from your bowel and bladder care to cooking and even eating. Activities of daily living, but it also means hiring people, managing their pay and the books so that you can report back to DHS how you've spent your money

You can see here that it takes a considerable amount of effort for department of human services to manage somebody on this program. The evaluation process happens yearly and can take up to a week to complete. Eliminating the income, cap limit and resource limit will turn this into a very simple equation that can be handled in probably 20 to 30 minutes, reducing the amount of time that a worker in DHS will have to think about or work on this problem.

The program is discriminatory between disabilities. The same formula issues for somebody who has a high level of injury as somebody with a lower level. In other words, if somebody needs a small amount of care per year, the way that the formula works they can easily get themselves off of the program and have a productive career. Someone with a higher level of disability, is subjected to the same formula. So somebody like myself will never be able to get a job that will allow me to make enough money out of the gate to be able to support my care needs.

People with disabilities like ours who need significant amount of assistance or like ducks in a pond. Floating on the surface, but our feet are moving 1,000 miles and minute under the water. anxiety permeates everything we do. In fact, the least of our problems is getting something off of a shelf. While this is still a problem, it isn't anything compared to the stress of trying to balance, your health, finances and staff.

The security of having this program augmented to remove the income, cap limit, and the resource limit will allow us to thrive next to all of the other able-bodied people we work with.

- I'll be able to save for an emergency
- Augment or add money to the amount of money I get from the department of human service to attract better caregivers, or even more hours
- Take promotions and pay raises
- Pay back into the system. Like Washington state, Oregon could implement a 7.5% buy in, so that as peoples pay increases, they pay more for their aid care and it isn't so hard for them to gradually get themselves off of services.

This is what that looks like in real numbers. In my particular case here are the numbers for me from 2022.

- In 2022 my private healthcare covered \$33,000 worth of medical expenses. And this was a fairly light year. I didn't buy any wheelchairs and I didn't have any surgeries.
- My actual care costs were \$72,000 for caregiver help
- Note because I am working I am not dipping into any kind of housing vouchers, I'm not on Social Security, and I receive no other benefits from the state or federal government

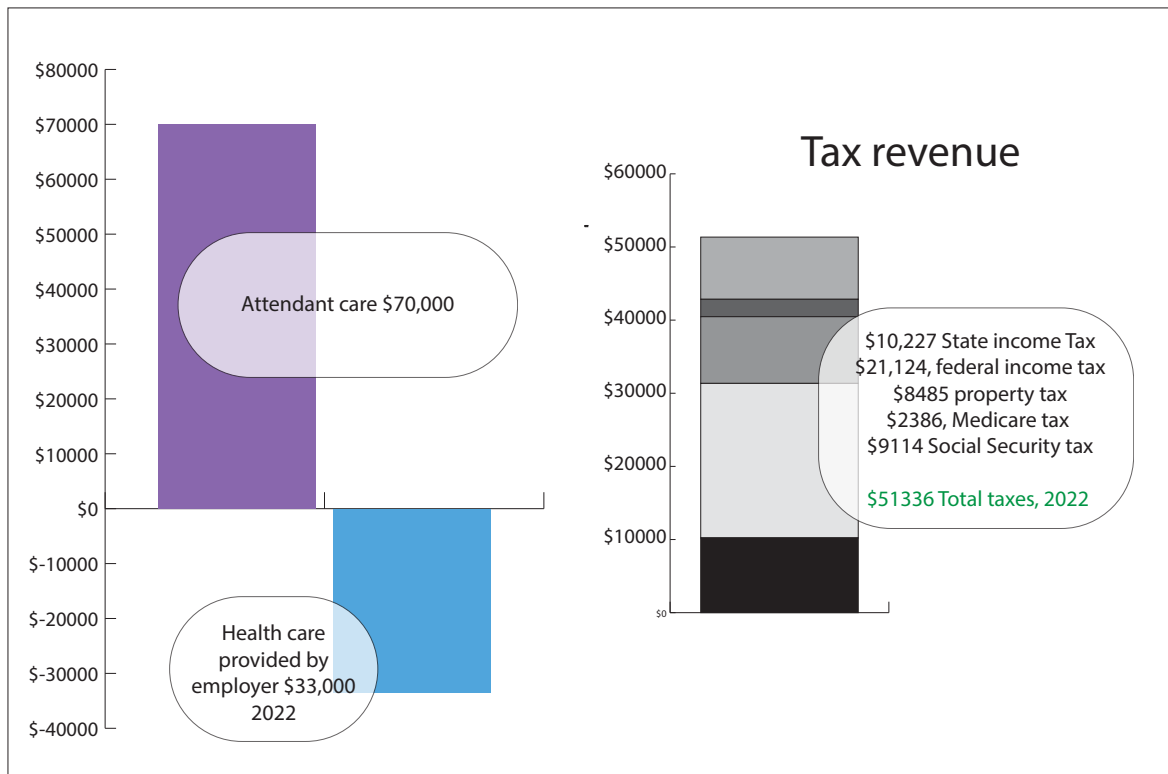
Because I work I can contribute back into the system.

- In different tax streams, I contributed \$51,000 in taxes in the year 2022

Total care costs of \$103,000 per year. At my current job and with my finances set up, I am offsetting that \$103,000 with my private pay health insurance that is covering \$33,000, and the taxes that I contribute back at \$51,000. Instead of \$103,000 per year its \$19,000 per year and with the buying it could be as little as \$9000

## Example

### Employed Person with Disabilities (-\$19,000)



# Example

Not employed (-\$103,000)

