



Attn: Senator Sara Gelser Blouin  
Senate Committee on Human Services  
900 Court Street, NE  
Salem OR 97301

February 4, 2023

RE: Paid Parent Caregiver bills SB 646 and SB 91

Dear Chair Gelser Blouin and Committee Members,

Please accept my written testimony in the above matter. I am the founder and executive director of a nonprofit organization that was established in 2010 to access and promote economic justice and stability for families and individuals with significant disabilities. I have been a legal advocate for people with disabilities for 17 years.

My expertise is securing Social Security disability benefits through the difficult federal application process. I have seen firsthand the extreme financial burdens that physical, mental and emotional illnesses have on families. I work with some of the most destitute in our state. Their need for economic security and stability is profound. Many are recipients of TANF, SNAP and Oregon Health Plan benefits already as they cannot support themselves through regular work outside the home. And as I understand it, there are even work restrictions for parents in the current system when a caregiver is in the home too.

I am in support of the comprehensive financial support of SB 646 that would continue to provide to families what they have already been found eligible for in State approved caregiving benefits. I am not in favor of SB 91 with its deep restrictions to the number of families who would be eligible for a parent caregiving income.

I have heard in meetings that the Medicaid dollars used for caregiving services are not to be used as an employment program for families and should not be being used for wages. I respectfully disagree and call this argument nonsense. Medicaid dollars are already being used for wages for non-family caregivers in the existing program and many other billable support programs for low-income family members for adults with disabilities. The opposition to this innovation and expansion of this program is essentially telling these young families in need that **this is your job and your burden and the taxpayers shouldn't have to help you pay for your burden.** Well, one cannot carry this opinion of parents of disabled children and then use the General Fund taxpayer dollars and Medicaid funds for long-established caregiving programs for the adult disabled and aged population. Essentially, this policy to exclude families of disabled children, demands that they carry the financial burden until the child is age 18. And then, and only then, the government will become a partner to a parent in supporting their severely disabled adults. The current policy acts as a gatekeeper of the Medicaid coffers and demands an undue burden on growing families with young children. Simply put, it is prejudicial to these

young families. These families and disabled children need stable income support. To pit the idea or parse words as to whether this is a parent's "job" versus their serious need for income support for their disabled children is a false equivalence.

I have also heard that an on-going program like this would not be financially feasible despite the fact that the budgetary actuary models currently being used are based on little more than half use of the actual caregiving hours already approved on APD's books. That is a short-sighted perspective and is borne from a place of scarcity in supporting our most vulnerable instead of abundance, and does not have the well-being of an already stricken family at heart. How many times have we seen important, yet underfunded human service programs slashed in the past such as the meager General Assistance program for adults with disabilities?

SB 91's restrictions also smack of a fear of fraud or that someone (mothers are usually the caregivers in the home) might take advantage of this program if a broad family support system were to be implemented or expanded. I firmly disagree with that perspective as well as that is the same argument we heard decades ago when an American president tried to demonize welfare families and called female assistance recipients "welfare queens." Those types of sentiments are jaded, cynical and offensive. Oregon's human services agents should be long past the fear of recipient fraud as many studies have proven benefits fraud to be extremely low across the board. It is time to continue to identify and call out this and other antiquated suspicions in our Medicaid programs too. We must keep working on this systemic paradigm shift to lift up our poor and afflicted, not keep them in poverty.

To quote now Governor Kotek from her campaign trail when asked about the paid parent caregiver program, "Our families know how to take care of their loved ones, and we have to figure out a way to do it differently. And if this has been working well, try to figure out how it would work and that we could pay for it at the State level." This temporary program has been working well and has brought tremendous relief to these young households.

Supporting working families is a priority of the Biden Administration as well as he seeks to lift up working families. A quote from the White House economic agenda page states: "[The President refers to his economic strategy as bottom-up and middle-out economics. That strategy starts with the idea that we should prioritize economic policies that help workers and families recover from economic downturns, avoid the scarring that is too often associated with joblessness and other economic challenges, and provide lower-income and middle-class Americans more breathing room by lowering the costs they face.](#)" There is no reason in the world that Medicaid funds cannot help young families with significant disabilities in the President's mission as well.

For far too long people and families with disabilities have been over-looked and marginalized as financial contributors. This is not a hand out but a hand up. 100% of this parent caregiver income goes straight back into supporting the disabled child, their family as a whole, and into our economy. These parents become contributing members of society again, not to mention they increase the number of jobs that are so carefully recorded by our government.

I respectfully urge support of SB 646 to truly expand the financial stability this program will bring to these incredibly dedicated families.

Sincerely,



Mellani Calvin, EDPNA  
Non-Attorney Representative