

Submitter: Caroline Jernigan  
On Behalf Of: Levi Jernigan  
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services  
Measure: SB646

My name is Caroline Jernigan, I live in Southern Oregon in a rural, historic town called Jacksonville, and I am the full time caregiver for my beloved son Levi. Our 8 year old son was diagnosed at three years of age with Cerebral Palsy and level III autism. He is 100% nonverbal, and is cognitively the age of a 8-10 month old baby. Being his paid caregiver has been life changing for our son.

Levi is a unique child, unlike any typical understanding of a child that the average person experiences. He relies on me and his father for his every need. Every sip of water he takes, every wiping of his nose, every diaper change, every step he takes, he needs the support of a capable individual.

And a capable individual has not been easy for us to come by. We have sought out care through companies. After having three different care providers quit on the spot after a very short time of service, it became clear to us that finding a willing and capable caregiver was not possible in our area.

To be frank, when my son accesses his dirty diaper despite our diligence in preventing it from happening, and smears fecal matter all over his room, only a mother is willing to clean and sanitize his entire room and floss the feces out of his teeth.

My son is incredible strong and heavy. And at only eight years old, he has a lot more physical growing on the horizon. Finding someone willing to change his diaper, lift him into his chair, chase him when he bolts is not something we have been able to find. Many of these situations that come up can be frustrating and challenge the range of human emotion. Only a mother and father can have the understanding required to not only do the hard work but do the hard work with a cheerful and pleasant attitude day in and day out.

At the end of the day, the reality is that only a mother and father will show up on time every day when our son wakes up at 5 o'clock in the morning, without any cancellation ever. We are consistent, we offer the love and affection our son deserves, there is no disruption to our other family members, and most importantly, our son's dignity is preserved. We have been given our precious son not by accident but for a purpose. It is our delight and our duty to serve the needs of our son. I am in support of the most inclusive bill possible for our children affected by disabilities, and I am in support of Bill SB 646.