

Scott Spencer MD, MPH  
Pediatric Associates of the Northwest  
2701 NW Vaughn Street  
Suite 360  
Portland OR 97212  
503-227-0671 (work)  
[sspencer@panwpc.com](mailto:sspencer@panwpc.com)

I support SB 646. I am a primary care pediatrician. I take special pride in caring for children with special needs. I welcome the challenge of helping their parents navigate their complex medical and mental health. I see first hand the substantial time and effort these parents devote, well beyond a parent of a child without special needs. Often their entire lives are devoted to their care. This could include coordinating multiple medications, operating medical devices such as a feeding tube, providing transportation such as a wheelchair, ensuring preventative care such as fall prevention, and tackling personal care and hygiene - such as feeding, clothing, bathing and toileting.... and not just when their child is young - but throughout their lives. They shuttle their children to multiple therapies, appointments, and medical procedures. They spend hours and hours advocating for their children to get the care they need from many different sources - insurance companies, health care organizations, schools and community organizations.

These same parents often struggle to find communities where their child can participate in activities outside the home (such as sports teams and clubs). This is especially true if their special need is behaviorally based, such as Autism. Often, they are also providing care at the school they attend, or at least it takes them substantially extra effort to get them to and from school. They get little to no break.

Many of these children qualify for state funded disability services, which often includes an in home care worker. But it is my understanding that there aren't enough qualified professionals to provide these services. Most of my families say it is impossible to find a care worker. And, even if they do find someone, I have heard many cases where there is a high turnover. Then the next care provider has to be retrained by those same parents.

Often at least one parent of a special needs child are prevented from working outside the home. They are already working to care for their special needs child. But much of the child's medical and personal care is the responsibility of the state through disability services. However, these parents do not currently get paid through the state.

The heavy burden of caring for special needs child is real. The mental, physical, and especially financial burden can be overwhelming. It is no doubt that families of special needs children have a higher risk of divorce, and in my experience, more mental illness such as depression. While the parents of the special needs children I care for are unwavering in their devotion, the sacrifices they make are sometimes too great to bear.

Passing SB 646, makes good sense. It would unburden, some of the most amazing yet extremely overworked parents. And those same parents, are providing a service that should have already been provided to them by the state, since their child has a qualified disability. Please vote yes on SB 646, it is good for all Oregonians - as one can never predict to whom a special needs child will be born.

Scott Spencer MD, MPH, FAAP