

Vicki Millard

2624 34<sup>th</sup> St.

Washougal, WA 98671

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Testimony before the Senate Committee on Health

SB 1565

Chair Patterson; Vice-Chair Hayden and members of the committee

My name is Vicki Millard. I am testifying today as a grandmother of a child impacted by this legislation and as a paid caretaker of that grandchild. I am mostly retired. When I look through my life's job titles, I am most proud of being a mom, grandmother, active school volunteer in classrooms, leader of parent teacher organizations and even serving as an elected local school committee member. I currently volunteer with AARP Tax Aide as a tax counselor providing income tax preparation service for seniors and low-income taxpayers. From this list it's apparent that the things I find most rewarding have been unpaid volunteer services.

For a long time, I resisted jumping through the hoops to be a paid care provider for my grandson. It didn't feel like it fit in my sense of self. I know my love language is doing for people I care about and doing it freely without expectation to be paid.

What changed my mind? Learning that the assessed hours of assistance that a child with disabilities like my grandson qualifies for are modified by the actual number of hours that were utilized from paid providers. Watching the difficulty my son and daughter-in-law have recruiting, interviewing, training, and trying to retain good people to work with Malachi. Knowing that my grandson will be cared for even when the paid providers don't show up or can't be hired due to lack of interest in a stressful, physically demanding, often emotionally charged job because his parents will ALWAYS step up and do what is required. At seventy-one I want to be a last line of defense not working multiple shifts a week.

In our family, many accommodations have been made to provide Malachi the care he needs with an emphasis on letting him experience as full and diverse life as possible. Career goals and aspirations have been modified or sidelined. I realize receiving pay as parent caretakers doesn't fix missed opportunities or lost dreams, but it helps reduce financial stress and in the case of our family it helps fund additional therapy and community experiences for Malachi.

My request for the committee members is to consider your commitment to help provide for this vulnerable community. Please understand that finding, recruiting, and training quality individuals to work with our loved ones is difficult and time consuming. Remember that the care of these children will be provided by parents and easing their financial burdens will benefit the entire family.

Money has been budgeted for this purpose, and it should be used for the care of disabled children. This should not be a revenue source to be harvested and reallocated to other programs while families are struggling. Most importantly, trust that parents will do their best to take care of their children and that the monitoring protections you have in place for non-parent care givers can be applied to parents to ensure the safety of their children.

These children are largely unseen and unheard. They do not appear on the nightly news, sleep on the streets, or take fentanyl. But their families need your help too. Please prioritize these vulnerable children and the families that support them by allowing parent paid care to contribute to the essential day to day care these children need. Hundreds of millions for the homeless and addicted, but not a penny for the children or their families?

I urge you to give this bill your full support. Thank you.