

COURTNEY NERON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 26



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of SB 538

February 4, 2025

Chair Patterson, Vice-chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

I write to you today in **strong support of SB538, a bill to ensure workforce and care for Oregon's very high needs children.**

A few years ago, I met with some of the mothers who are here today to learn about this topic. Their stories were, at times, shocking and all extremely compelling. Since then, we've worked together to try to address this issue in our legislature.

Oregon has a duty to ensure that our children with the highest medical and behavioral needs receive the care they qualify for, and frankly, require. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, the federal government recognized parents as essential caregivers, allowing them to be compensated for providing specialized care to their children. Oregon then adopted a temporary paid parent caregiver waiver, which successfully stabilized families, significantly improved fragile children's health outcomes, and expanded access to care. In 2023, the legislature took further action with SB 91, creating a statutory pathway for paying parent caregivers. Unfortunately, today over 1,500 *eligible* children remain on the waitlist for the Children's Extraordinary Needs waiver (CEN), including one of my medically fragile child constituents, Tensy.

SB 538 ensures that all eligible children have a place in the CEN waiver and it includes reassurance that any appropriation by our legislature for these services may NOT be used for any other purpose. At its core, this bill aims to eliminate barriers to essential care.

In 2024 The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in their updated technical guidance, urged states to prioritize paid parent caregiving as a means of fulfilling existing obligations. Numerous states have followed this guidance. I want to emphasize that these are hours the child qualifies for, regardless of who provides the

care. With that in mind, I hope it makes sense when I claim that this is **not a new budgetary request**.

SB538 is a commonsense way to ensure Oregon meets its **existing commitment** to provide care hours for eligible children. Each family has already gone through a determination as to how many hours of care their qualifying child can receive. I firmly believe that the extraordinary skills and caregiving these parents provide within our state deserves inclusion as part of our paid workforce.

Especially in the midst of a significant caregiver workforce shortage - paying our hard working parents who are filling this need is a logical and impactful way to make good on the promise Oregon has made to these families. **This is an investment that keeps families together, avoids costly placements in group homes, and ultimately reduces costs for the state.**

Tensy's Law represents a practical and necessary step to bring stability and support to families in my district (and all of our districts) who are navigating extraordinary medical and behavioral challenges. Oregon's highest needs children and their families cannot (and should not have to) wait any longer.

I urge you to recognize the essential work our parent caregivers provide. Please support SB 538.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney Neron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Representative Courtney Neron
House District 26: King City, Sherwood, Tigard, Wilsonville