



February 12, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Human Services

From: West Livaudais

Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection - www.oregonsci.org

Disability Health & Employment Equity Coalition - www.disabilityequitycoalition.org

Dear Chair Senator Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Senator Linthicum, and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

I am providing this testimony in support of SB 20.

What follows is an explicit example of how employed Oregonians with disabilities are serving their disability community as community health workers but are not being compensated with a living wage because of Medicaid asset and income eligibility restrictions

In 2013, I became paralyzed. Out of that experience I founded Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection (OSCI) to ensure every Oregonian with a spinal cord injury has the care and community they need to thrive.

A central strategy of OSCI to fulfill its mission is to employ people with spinal cord injuries as community health workers (CHW). These CHWs have lived-experience of spinal cord injury and possess an in-depth knowledge of barriers to resources and services that the community faces.

OSCI CHW Team responds to the acute needs of people living with spinal cord injury, as well as implements programs that build community. OSCI receives referrals from healthcare providers at every juncture of the healthcare delivery system, as well as from other social services organizations. The CHW Team provides intensive client case management for newly injured people or those who are not thriving. They also coordinate the community programs, including community meet-ups, adaptive hiking, camping and outdoor recreation, wheelchair maintenance workshops, and educational forums. The CHWs' work creates direct links to care and strengthens the social fabric of this community.

Unfortunately, some of our employees can't be hired full-time or paid competitive wages, even though we have funding, because of the Medicaid asset and income eligibility restriction for employed people with disabilities. This year one of our CHWs actually had to decline a cost-of-living-adjustment so as to not risk the health benefits they receive.



Effectively, this policy not only harms our employees, it restricts the organization's ability to hire qualified candidates by shrinking our employee candidate pool. Ultimately, this is hamstringing OSCI's ability to fulfill its mission. Literally, there are Oregonians with spinal cord injury that we can not reach because this policy is suppressing our growth and impact.

I'm asking you to please support this legislation. It will create employment equity for Oregonians with disabilities that ushers in new pathways to prosperity, innovation and health for Oregon's disability community.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "West Livaudais".

West Livaudais
Executive Director
Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection