

Submitter: Jake French
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB20

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

My testimony is strongly in support of SB 576. As a full-time time resident of Washington County, I have lived as a quadriplegic for 14 years. After doing everything right such as graduating college with honors, then getting my dream job to the Oregon Department of Forestry, my neck was broken in a freak accident where I was a victim of bullying. As if life wasn't turned upside down enough, since my old career as a forester is no longer possible, I've had to retrain myself in an entirely new field with a new body that has severely limited capabilities.

When this accident happened, I never could have imagined the biggest barrier to another career path would not be my wheelchair-bound body, but a set of outdated laws. As it stands now, if I ever accumulated \$5000 worth of assets or made enough money to be considered near the poverty level, I would lose eligibility for the programs that are necessary for me to get medical supplies like catheters and medicines. Do you realize how disincentivizing this is? Of course, I would love to be able to work hard, consistently make good money, and earn out of state assistance altogether. However, it's set up as an either or route currently. You either make just enough to stay under the limits but not really be substantially gainful, or you make enough to be considered at the poverty level, and you lose more benefits than you could pay for with the meager amount of income you've earned. Why are we making it so hard for our most vulnerable population to better their lives?

To make even more challenging, disabled people like myself cannot count on our bodies to be healthy 100% of the time. Can you imagine how devastating it would be to start working consistently, earn over

the income limits, then you randomly get a pressure sore or some other medical issue that sidelines you for months. Now you have disqualified yourself for any of the benefits you need, and you're still not able to work because of something you can't help. For this reason, most of my friends are too scared to even try programs like the EPD.

We desperately need you to support HP576 now. Please give us the ability to earn back our dignity, self-worth, and income that isn't restricted to an amount that makes it impractical to even try. Over time this would even save the taxpayer money because if we're able to work without fear of losing benefits, many of us won't need as much help down the road.

Sincerely,

Jake French
Volunteer board member of Shangri-La