

Pete Denman

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02/12/2025

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Oregon State Legislature

Re: SB 20

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Lithicum, and esteemed committee members of the Oregon Disabilities Commission,

My name is Pete Denman, and I am a quadriplegic. I sustained my injury at the age of 20, and now, at nearly 57, I have spent decades in a wheelchair, witnessing significant changes in the perception and treatment of disabilities. This journey has provided me with extensive lived experience regarding disability programs and public attitudes. I want to share how the EPD program has both supported and constrained me, illustrating my story and the effects that updating this bill could bring.

My accident occurred in 1988, before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted. The ADA would be introduced a few years later and implemented over subsequent decades. This legislation was a monumental step toward granting equal rights and access to essential public systems for individuals with disabilities. While I appreciate these advancements, I often reflect on the challenges I faced prior to these freedoms, especially during my travels. This situation highlights the importance of addressing problems and identifying opportunities. Improved access has allowed many to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives, but there remains an issue with achieving a sense of purpose.

Before addressing that issue, I want to mention another important solution: the government's vocational rehabilitation program, established post-Civil War to assist wounded veterans in securing meaningful employment. This program was revitalized alongside the ADA, and I benefited from it greatly. It provided me with education and valuable skills. While I was in college, a new initiative called "Ticket to Work" was introduced, marking the first step toward allowing individuals to work while retaining their benefits. Shortly after, Oregon implemented an expanded version of this program called "Employed Persons with Disabilities" (EPD), which was set up just before I entered the workforce.

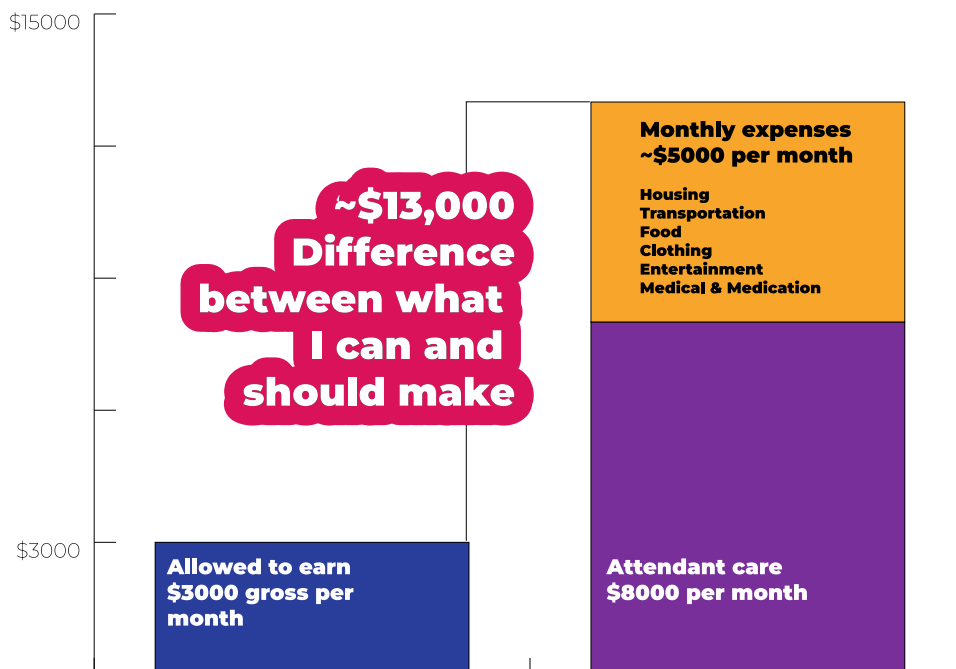
While the EPD program has enabled me to achieve several milestones, it has also placed limitations on my progress. I will illustrate this through a few graphs to demonstrate my experiences and the program's shortcomings.

1. The services I require cannot be fully covered by someone just entering the workforce, who may never be able to meet all their needs, regardless of their earnings. It's essential to explore ways to enable individuals to maintain their services while working. The first chart illustrates my current earnings cap compared to my actual living expenses.
2. Everyone needs a financial cushion for emergencies, such as health issues or job loss. Financial advisors typically recommend saving enough to cover three to six months of expenses. However, as shown in the second graphic, individuals are only permitted to save \$5,000. When considering my living costs, this is far from adequate.
3. The final graph demonstrates the impact of employment versus unemployment. It compares my monthly contributions to the tax base while working against the assistance I would require when not working, using average figures to illustrate the difference.

Thank you for your time.

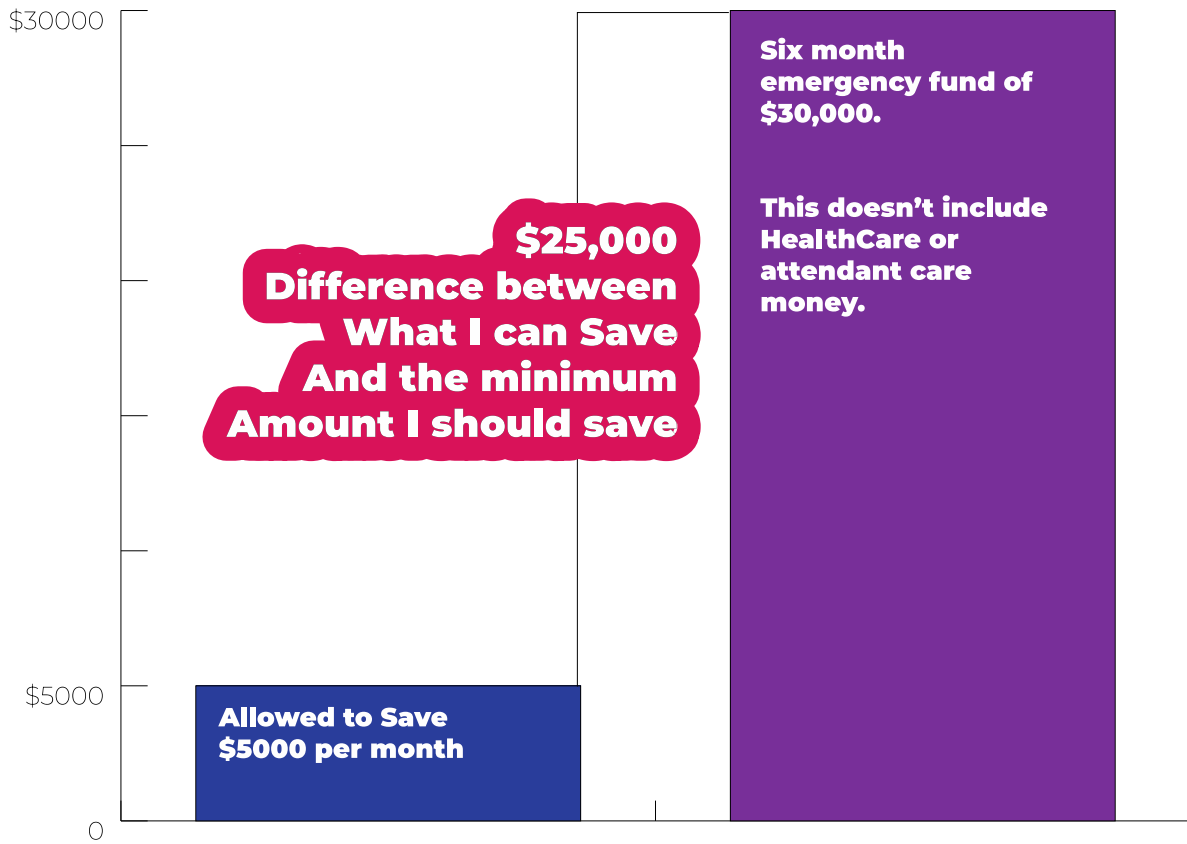
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Allowed to earn approximately \$3000 per month need approximately \$13,000 per month



Support SB 20

Not allowed to save money for anything other than retirement



Support SB 20

Amount of Government Assistance Needed, Monthly Support SB 20

