

Submitter: Richard Beckwith  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB20

I am writing in support of SB 20, which is needed by many skilled Oregonians who can contribute so much to our community, yet require assistance with their activities of everyday living.

I know that my friend and colleague Pete Denman will be going to Salem to encourage legislators to pass this bill into law. I heard about this law from Pete. Perhaps you have met him or will meet him in the near future. Pete is a talented and energetic designer who happens to have quadriplegia and has been in a wheelchair for nearly 40 years. I have recently retired from Intel where I worked on many projects with Pete. He has worked on everything from performance support tools for technicians in our fabs (like those in Aloha) to communications support for Stephen Hawking. Pete has found an area in which he can excel, and he has excelled in it.

Pete has a “good paying job” where he certainly makes a contribution to Intel and the world at large. However, to do this, he relies on some state support. His pay is not so high that he can afford to pay for “helpers”, but he needs them to assist him at home. The pay for helpers is a cost over and above the everyday costs associated with living that all people incur and which our pay for employment is expected to cover. This usual salary is what we often call “a living wage”.

“A living wage” is one of those areas where the playing field can be said to be level for both able-bodied and disabled. Employers are not required to and simply cannot be expected to figure home-helper salaries into employee compensation. As a consequence, a living wage never includes a second (or even third) person’s salary. So, this playing field is level when it should not be: making a living on a living wage is one of those areas where those with disabilities are disadvantaged.

In addition to keeping valuable people out of the workforce, withdrawing state support for people making a normal living wage can have a paradoxical effect on the state budget. When helper pay must be withdrawn from a person’s salary, that can mean that other costs, normal costs of living, cannot be paid. When a helper salary must be paid, instead of working, the gainfully employed person with what would otherwise be a "living wage" would have to give up their job so that the state would pay the cost for that very same helper. Why? Regulations allow this to be paid from a separate pot for someone who is unemployed. So, paradoxically, the state doesn’t actually save that money at all; it is simply paid through a different means.

Withdrawing support to save the state money can have further paradoxical effects. Most workers in larger companies are entitled to group healthcare benefits – private

insurance. Leaving the workplace puts healthcare back on state expense. In Oregon, the CDC estimates that about 40% of state healthcare expenditures are for Oregonians with disabilities (<https://www.cdc.gov/dhds/impacts/index.html>). Failing to pass SB 20 would certainly raise this 40% rate.

I'm requesting that the Joint Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee support this legislation.

Please support SB 576. 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!

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