

Senate Committee on Human Services
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Full Support of Senate Bill 909

Chair Gelser-Bloiun, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

I write today in strong support of Senate Bill 909, a critical piece of legislation that seeks to expand and strengthen services for children with complex needs in Oregon. As a registered nurse with 17 years of experience, I have cared for these children in the emergency department and witnessed their struggles firsthand. Additionally, a dedicated disability advocate and a mother to a child with a disability, I am also a mother to twin daughters experiencing disabilities, including mental health needs; I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that families face in accessing adequate and flexible support for children with significant medical and behavioral health needs. This bill represents a necessary step forward in ensuring that children with severe emotional disturbances, physical disabilities, and chronic illnesses receive the home and community-based services they require to thrive.

Why Senate Bill 909 Is Essential

1. **Enhancing Home and Community-Based Services:** By directing the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to provide innovative and flexible services, SB 909 ensures that children with severe emotional disturbances receive person-centered care that meets their unique needs. This includes critical services such as specialized respite care, job coaching, family counseling, peer support, and crisis support networks. These services are essential in keeping children with complex needs safe and supported in their homes and communities rather than requiring institutional placements.
2. **Removing Financial Barriers to Care:** The bill mandates disregarding parental income when determining a child's eligibility for medical assistance if they require a hospital, nursing home, or psychiatric level of care. This critical change acknowledges that families should not have to choose between financial stability and their child's healthcare needs. Too often, parents are forced to navigate impossible bureaucratic hurdles, including relinquishing custody of their child to access needed services. SB 909 eliminates this cruel dilemma and ensures families can access their children's care without financial hardship.
3. **Ensuring Coordination Across Agencies:** Many children with complex medical and behavioral health needs require services across multiple agencies, including health care, education, and social services. SB 909 mandates coordination between OHA, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and educational providers to streamline access

to care, prevent service duplication, and maximize support for families. By creating a more seamless system, children will receive timely interventions, reducing the likelihood of crises and costly institutional placements.

4. **Immediate and Necessary Action:** By declaring an emergency and making the bill effective upon passage, SB 909 acknowledges the urgency of the situation. Families cannot afford to wait years for incremental policy changes—children with complex needs require immediate action to ensure their well-being and stability.

Personal Perspective

Utilizing hospital emergency departments as an interim facility for children with complex needs is entirely inappropriate due to the long-term impact on the children themselves. They deserve proper, dedicated support systems rather than placed in an environment not designed for sustained care.

I do not feel that I should have to trauma dump my child's story as a requirement to receive adequate services for my child. We must recognize that supporting parents from the beginning, rather than waiting until after a crisis, leads to better outcomes for children and families. Moreover, we should do everything possible to support all children, as they are our future.

As a nurse, disability advocate, and mother of a child with significant disabilities and mental health needs, I know the barriers that families encounter when seeking necessary care. Many families struggle to access Medicaid-funded services due to income eligibility restrictions, even when their child requires extensive medical and behavioral health support. Additionally, the lack of flexible community-based services often exhausts parents, who lack adequate respite or crisis intervention. SB 909 provides a clear path to address these gaps, offering a comprehensive, proactive approach that prioritizes keeping children with their families.

Conclusion

Senate Bill 909 is a bold and necessary step toward ensuring that Oregon's most vulnerable children receive the services they need to lead healthy, stable lives. I urge the members of this committee and the Oregon Legislature to support this bill and advocate for its swift passage. Oregon families deserve a system that prioritizes children's well-being and empowers them to thrive in their homes and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to provide additional information or share further testimony as needed.

Sincerely,

Lisa Ledson, BSN, RN

West Linn, Oregon

