



**DISABILITY  
HEALTH & EMPLOYMENT  
EQUITY COALITION**

**Our Mission** is to make Medicaid, healthcare, and employment equitable for people with disabilities in Oregon.

Committee Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama, and fellow members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services,

My name is Andrew Caruana. I am the Legislative Advocacy Coordinator for the Disability Health & Employment Equity Coalition, among other relevant roles. Although I wear many hats, today, I am here in my capacity as an affected citizen and Coalition member.

I am writing to express my heartfelt support for SB20 and to strongly advocate for its passage, full funding, and inclusion in the ODHS budget. SB20 would remove the income and asset limits currently placed on the EPD program, which is responsible for allowing disabled Oregonians to work and retain Medicaid benefits. It limits participants to roughly \$17 an hour and no more than \$5,000 in assets/savings. These limits were envisioned as a way to prioritize fiscal responsibility. However, it has instead resulted in disabled Oregonians being forced to decline raises, remain under-employed, keep us impoverished and reliant on more public assistance, and, in the worst of cases, force us to choose between our jobs and access to life-saving medical assistance.

The reality I face, like so many others, is that I will either be denied Medicaid under current EPD regulations when I become a counselor, or I will have to deliberately under-employ myself despite holding a bachelor's degree and boasting a lengthy resume. Like many Disabled Oregonians, despite the blood, sweat, and tears I have put into achieving independence and making a life for myself, I am being left behind by the services that promised to support me.

After several decades of the EPD program, we know that the asset and income limits in place aren't sufficient to live on, and they keep recipients so poor that they force us to rely on additional assistance, meaning that EPD has fallen short of its goal to be a fiscally responsible program that promotes independence from welfare. Disabled Oregonians want to experience independence and economic freedom through gainful, meaningful employment. We want to be contributing members of our community. We want marriage to be economically viable and to be able to raise families. We want to save for retirement. We want to live our lives to the fullest.

This is our third long session advocating for the passage of this measure: first as SB584, then SB576, and now as SB20. In the nearly 6 years that have passed since this work began, our struggle has only become more dire; more of us have left employment altogether, and more of us have lost our medical benefits, but all of us are suffering, and we are all tired. SB20 is not a wishlist of policy prescriptions; it is not a policy we want; it is a policy we need.



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The sad fact for disabled Oregonians is that we are experiencing simultaneous health and economic crises that we and this legislature can no longer sustain. The EPD program in its current form does not work for Disabled Oregonians; it does not work for the State, and urgent action is needed.

Committee Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama, and fellow members of the Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee, your constituents and disabled Oregonians across the state implore you to include, fully fund, and ultimately pass this legislation out of Committee within the ODHS budget with overwhelming bipartisan support and fiercely advocate for its full passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this most pressing matter.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Andrew Caruana*

Disability Health & Employment Equity Coalition | Legislative Advocacy Coordinator



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