

Submitter: Jessica Waller

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5526

Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

I am writing to express my support regarding SB20, a bill that proposes to require the Department of Human Services to administer a program to provide medical assistance to employed individuals with disabilities without regard to the individuals' income or resources.

As a resident of Oregon, an employee of Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection, and an adult child of someone with a spinal cord injury, I understand how ableism is often perpetuated under the guise of fiscal responsibility. The asset and income restrictions for people who are disabled is a perfect example of this. The reality is that it is just more expensive to live with a disability. There are a variety of out-of-pocket expenses not covered by insurance that able-bodied people just do not have to consider. This means the money employed disabled people earn just does not go as far as it does for someone without a disability. Even if they can make enough to survive, they will never be able to save for the future. Aging with a disability has its own additional costs. The income and asset restrictions keep people with disabilities in a cycle of poverty.

Many people lose their sense of identity after a life-changing injury and their mental and physical health suffers. Allowing these fellow Oregonians to work without restrictions enables them to rebuild their independence and identity. It allows them to contribute to society in a meaningful way. Employment is often a sign of someone who is adjusting to their spinal cord injury and reintegrating to society. Individuals who adjust well after spinal cord injury tend to have better health outcomes which ultimately costs the system less. Work is therapy in many ways.

There are many people on our staff at Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection who struggle with income and asset restrictions. I have had many personal conversations with my colleagues about the impact this has on their life and their mental and physical health. They all want to do more and give back to their communities, but are stifled by the income restrictions. We have a staff member who has not had a pay increase in years because they can't accept it or they would lose benefits. They feel stuck and don't see any way to improve their situation. Because of the secondary health conditions that often accompany spinal cord injury - pressure sores, incontinence, bowel control, physical therapy, and more - they need their medical coverage and OHP is the only real option for them. The current income and asset

restrictions leave them stuck.

I urge the committee members to support the passage of SB20. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Waller  
Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection