

State Representative Sara Gelser(HD-16)

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Reps. Gelser, Cameron Announce “Welcome Home” Legislation

Bill package will provide access to health care for children with disabilities, while keeping families together

SALEM--Reps. Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis) and Kevin Cameron (R-Salem) announced at a press conference Thursday plans for a package of legislation (HB 2406-7) that will put needed health services in reach of children with disabilities and their families while keeping children and parents together.

"Both of these bills are about a simple idea: all kids should have the opportunity to grow up with families who love them," said Gelser. "This legislation puts those values into action by providing critical assistance to families and encouraging their unity and independence."

Under the current system, many families raising children with complex disabilities are forced to bankrupt or artificially impoverish themselves or relinquish custody of their children to foster care or nursing homes in order to receive necessary medical services.

Shawna Harvey, who attended the news conference with her 12-year-old daughter Hannah told reporters, "I am deeply committed to raising my child at home and avoiding institutionalization. These bills would be a huge help to our family."

Harvey, a single mother of two has been forced to turn down pay increases and keep her work hours reduced in order to avoid ineligibility for the limited assistance she receives to care for Hannah, who is visually and cognitively impaired and suffers from a seizure disorder. Harvey cannot afford the out-of-pocket medical costs of Hannah's care even on full-time income without State support.

The Welcome Home Legislation, which is co-sponsored by more than 20 Democratic and Republican State Representatives and State Senators, would improve and expand access to needed medical services including in-home care and medical supplies and equipment by:

- Creating a medically involved home-care program in the Department of Human Services designed for children with disabilities and complex medical needs--a program which would base eligibility on the child's needs, not income.
- Expanding access to the Oregon Health Plan by allowing families raising children with disabilities to pay a premium to buy into Medicaid as a supplement to their private insurance.

"As a father, I understand the importance of keeping our families with us," said Cameron. "I am proud to co-sponsor these bills which will end this upside down injustice that forces families apart in order to get needed medical care for their children."

The House Committee on Human Services and Women's Wellness will take testimony on the bills Friday from medical professionals, home caregivers, children's health care policy experts and parents raising children with disabilities and complex medical needs.

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