

My name is Laura Ochoa, I am a resident of Portland, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 296.

I am a full-time community health worker providing healthcare services to migrant workers in the Latino community. I have many years of experience working in hospitals and home care. For ten years I was a caregiver for my partner, Nick, who loved to ski, and was paralyzed from a ski accident in 2010. For ten years I was taking care of him 24/7. It was a labor of love.

Nick was a successful businessman, athletic, loved classical music and art. At age 59, Nick became paralyzed from a ski accident and spent the last ten years of his life in a wheelchair. He could only move his fingers. Every day starting at 5:30 AM I would help him exercise, bathe him, comb his hair, brush his teeth, lift him in and out of his wheelchair, transport him to the pharmacy and many doctor appointments, cook, clean, pay the bills. By 9:30 AM we were both exhausted.

Over the years his health gradually became worse and in January 2020 he got pneumonia and had to use a ventilator. His condition worsened and he wasn't responding to antibiotics or communicating. I was with him until the end.

For those ten years, my life was on hold and I was exhausted. I couldn't work in my field or see my family or friends. We tried hiring help but they were unreliable. I couldn't get a full night's sleep because I needed to check on Nick 4-5 times in the night. I miss him so much and I know he's in a better place now.

Caregivers need breaks, time for self-care, connection with other caregivers, access to resources, and financial support. Our careers are put on hold. Our social lives are on hold. I took care of Nick because I love him and many families like us want to stay together and take care of each other. We don't want to put our loved ones in nursing homes. I believe caregivers should be paid and recognized for their hard work, which is why I support LD 296.

Thank you,  
Laura Ochoa