



Real Choice Initiative

PEER MENTORS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

February 7, 2023

Chair Dexter, Co-Vice Chairs Gamba, Helfrich and Members of the Committee:

When I arrived in Portland, Oregon in 2010, I was just coming off a national music tour. Before that I was a Wilderness Guide near Moab, Utah and before that, a middle and high school band director. Every season I was outdoors hiking, rock climbing, white water rafting, teaching others how to make fire from rubbing sticks together, you name it. Part of why moved to Portland was so I could learn to surf and still be a snowboarder without having to travel far. I was only gonna use my car for grocery trips and getting outta town and for everything else, I was gonna ride my bicycle.

I was riding my bicycle six weeks after arriving when my 150 lb body following all the rules of the road was no match for a 5,000 lb station wagon. After initial contact, I yelled for him to stop but instead, he kept driving. He dragged me around and when I finally landed, the concussion was already setting in. I needed shoulder surgery on my left side and hip surgery on the other. My dominant hand was broken but it took three years to get a cast. Now it's been 13 and four wrist surgeries later, I can use my finally use it again. I wish the same were true for the other parts but I got an appointment later today to talk about back surgery.

My instinct after playing sports my whole life was to get up and walk it off. I told everyone I was fine until it dawned on me seven months later, I couldn't push my way through this one. Between rent, bills and medical expenses, I burned through my \$5,000 savings and had to choose between homelessness and moving into an upstairs bedroom with someone who didn't get me.

Along the way, I learned the ADA doesn't cover housing, the Fair Housing Act doesn't do enough, and Section 504 doesn't cover private homes. 7 of the 10 of the places I've lived had stairs. But I was one of the lucky ones, I survived, I rose from the ashes and created a life from my wheelchair but most others in my circumstances don't. They end up in institutions, on the street or dead. I urge you to work with Community Vision and other accessibility experts on House Bill 2889 so stories like mine become our collective past.

Thank you,

Nico Serra
Real Choice Initiative Board of Directors