

DATE: March 19, 2022

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: Sharon Drennan

RE: Letter of Support for Assembly Bill 873

Chair Murphy and members of the Colleges and Universities Committee,

On behalf of myself, my son, Rob, and the entire SCI community, we thank you for your time and commitment to this hearing. Twelve years ago, my son was an active 14-year-old middle school student playing sports and running through our neighborhood with his group of friends. We knew he was born with a vascular condition, but it went under-diagnosed until we realized it was eroding his spinal cord. Surgery to correct what was happening to his spine left him a paraplegic. I can't begin to tell you the nightmare our family endured when this unexpected tragedy rocked our lives. Our world was turned upside down and has never returned to those simpler days.

My son is now 26 years old and lives as independently as he possibly can. Although we have support from family and friends, the last 12 years have been more than difficult. Enduring a spinal cord injury and the immediate rehab that comes with that is only the tip of the iceberg. The setbacks over the years have included numerous hospitalizations due to infections and pressure wounds, bone atrophy, the humiliation that comes with random bowel and bladder accidents, and most importantly to Rob, the loss of sexual function. No man or woman should have to live with this cruelty.

Over the years we have seen so much hope and promise in scientific and medical research that could potentially restore function for hundreds of thousands of individuals. We are so close to finding a cure, but we are a community that has historically been underfunded and that needs to change. Those living with spinal cord injuries not only deserve this funding but also a seat at the table where they can share their lived experiences and weigh in on the prioritization of ongoing research.

I dream of the day my son will have a return of function bringing him the dignity and daily pleasures of a lifestyle so many of us take for granted.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I ask for the committee to support AB 873 as we continue to move toward a cure.

Sincerely,
Sharon Drennan