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Testimony: Jeff Adams, Troutdale

Injured Workers Should Get the Insurance Benefits They Pay for and Need Legal Help When that Doesn't Happen

I'm writing to the MLAC committee hoping that my case will help change the way attorneys who help injured workers are paid, because we can't do it without them and I can't believe they don't get paid when they fight for us to get the benefits we deserve. The system is too big and too powerful and these insurance companies just tell you what you deserve and who you can see and that's that.

I'm an electrician who's been in the field for 20 years. I was on a job out in Clackamas working on setting a telephone poll. Basically, our crew was two guys and a shovel that day. Needless to say the conditions weren't reasonably in line with the job we'd been assigned and I injured my back really bad. Since my company covers their employees through SAIF, I had to go see their doctor and not the one I wanted, but it was clear I needed an operation.

I got the surgery and then long story short, I got a notice that my claim was closing with a dollar amount and I had no idea if that was going to cover me or not. This is where I praise the lord I went to my attorney for help. She explained to me what my rights were when nobody else would. She was the layer of protection that I needed to get through the whole confusion. She explained that I could accept the amount and receive it all 100%. I asked how much she would get paid, and she said nothing. I said, "You must be crazy!" Basically she was looking at my options, advising me that my claim closure amount was good and I should take it – and that advice was all free. That didn't make any sense to me.

Then it got really tricky when SAIF decided to take back their offer and challenge it. Again, I went to my attorney for advice and she said they were trying to get a reduction and I could wind up actually getting less. This was really scary to me and I felt like things could go south really quick. With her help she settled the case and I got back to work on a modified program.

My doctors had first said I should be medically "stationary" so I'm very thankful my company put me through the vocational program so I could continue working. I'm now doing office work – project management and estimates. I'll never work in the field again and honestly, it's all I've known for most of my life. But you take your lumps and move on. I'm so very grateful that I got what I did because I had my attorney by my side. Things could have turned out much worse without her.

I think every injured worker in my type of situation should be able to get help from an attorney who knows the tricks SAIF might use to not pay a claim. I don't understand how they can keep doing what they're doing without getting paid. That's only going to hurt more injured workers in the future. I hope you can change that. Thank you.