

March 25, 2013

To: Oregon House Health Care Committee
From: Main Street Alliance of Oregon
Re: Support for HB 2118, - 1 amendment

Chair Greenlick and committee members,

My name is Lee Mercer, director of the Main Street Alliance of Oregon. We are a statewide network of small business owners with 1200 businesses on our roster. Business owners in our group are speaking out on policy issues impacting small businesses and our communities. We are in support of HB 2118, - 1 amendment.

Main Street Alliance was formed in the debate over federal health care reform, and has been a strong supporter and defender of the Affordable Care Act. We are particularly enthusiastic about and supportive of the planning and roll-out of Cover Oregon. We are working with Cover Oregon staff to promote the exchange to businesses throughout the state.

That being said, we are anxious about it's roll-out. In a September 14 letter to the Cover Oregon board (signed by 60 small business owners statewide) we outlined concerns about keeping the cost of health insurance affordable. At that time we urged the board to adopt standards that require insurance companies participating in the exchange to outline and implement strategies to contain costs.

We cited polling Main Street Alliance has been doing among small business owners in rural Oregon on their knowledge of and interest in Cover Oregon. We found that of 344 owners of businesses in rural Oregon, from Hood River to Joseph, from Astoria to Brookings, from Albany to Ashland and in Bend/Redmond:

- 86% do not provide health insurance for their employees.

Many cite cost as why, even if they formerly provided health insurance, they do not now.

- 80% are unaware that Cover Oregon will begin taking applications from small business owners in 2013.
- But the good news is that the majority, 69%, would like more information about Cover Oregon. They see it as potential light at the end of a long dark tunnel in searching for health coverage for their employees.

Thus, we are excited about promoting Cover Oregon to small businesses statewide. But we are fearful that the sticker shock businesses may experience if we fail to contain costs, may preclude them from participating

We are in support of this bill as it proposes tangible steps to address the issue of affordability by creating means to negotiate premiums and cost share. We urge you to vote yes on HB 2118, - 1 amendment.

Thanks for your time and consideration in this matter.