

To: Health Care Committee, Oregon House of Representatives

From: Roberta Hall, 620 NW Witham Drive, Corvallis, Oregon, 97330

Re: HB 2922; hearing May 13, 2012

May 5, 2013

For many years I have been in favor of a universal, publicly funded health care system and I am pleased to wholeheartedly back HB 2922.

In 1970, after completing a doctorate in Oregon, I accepted a teaching position in British Columbia. One of the many reasons I accepted was that I knew that health coverage for my family of 4 would not be a concern. In returning to Oregon four years later to teach at OSU, I developed courses in Medical Anthropology. I also did research on health issues in a post-doc in Connecticut and in research with the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board. Throughout this period, insurance became more costly and cut more and more friends, students, and family members out. I determined that if I survived to retire I would work for a universal health care system here, so in 2004 I joined Mid-Valley Health Care Advocates.

Over the years I have seen many inequities. Lacking a universal healthcare system, Oregon has many part-time University, community college, and public school teachers who have NO health coverage. Among other problems, this creates a two-tiered system that makes an unhealthy work environment. The same is true in most private employment situations as both public and private employers feel forced to hire part-time employees to avoid high OPE (other personnel expenses).

A good friend of mine about age 60 suffered a rare throat cancer two years ago. Her husband's job provides some insurance but that meant that during her care he could not leave work; fortunately, a number of friends filled in so that she was not left alone during treatment, including tube feeding. She has recovered from the cancer, but medical issues remain. He is over 65 and qualifies for Medicare but because his work is very physically demanding, it comes at a health cost to him. Yet he cannot leave work and give up even the high-deductible insurance coverage he has, or they will face bankruptcy.

I have come to believe that employment-based health insurance is the worst possible way to provide medical care. I have many acquaintances who would like to work for themselves, but the need for health coverage for the family ties them to a dead-end job. What creativity we could unleash if medical access did not govern every decision an individual makes!

Many more points can be made, but I hope these few observations provide some insights that I and many other Oregonians have on this issue. Let's get going!