



March 30, 2015

**Retaining Primary Care Providers for Rural and Other Underserved Communities  
Testimony of Laura Etherton, OPCA Policy Director, in Support of the -1 Amendment to HB 3396**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the -1 amendment to HB 3396. This amendment would focus efforts on recruitment and retention of health providers for underserved populations, and study a possible additional incentive to retain providers through development of a retirement savings program.

OPCA is the association of Oregon's 32 Community Health Centers (also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers – or FQHCs). These nonprofit health centers operate more than 200 health clinic sites across the state, and are where over 358,000 Oregonians receive primary care – including integrated medical, dental and behavioral health services.

As primary care providers for many of Oregon's underserved communities, Community Health Centers are concerned that Oregon faces a shortage of primary care providers for these populations. Currently, 32 of Oregon's 36 counties are designated as a type of primary care Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). With 42% of existing physicians, nurse practitioners and physician's assistants at age 55 or older<sup>1</sup>, we are concerned that this shortage is likely to worsen in the coming years.

Oregon has a diverse set of vital primary care provider incentive programs designed to help recruit and retain health providers in rural and other underserved communities. The value of these newly recruited providers increases as their skills develop and they build relationships in their community, but it can be difficult to retain providers in underserved areas beyond their first few years.

A key challenge for these new providers is the ability to begin saving for retirement when it matters most, early in their careers. A targeted retirement program to complement existing programs could improve retention, strengthening Oregon's primary care workforce in these underserved areas. The -1 amendment includes a requirement for a study of a retirement program as a primary care provider retention strategy to complement other health workforce incentive programs, and develop recommendations for such a program if found effective.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this amendment to HB 3396.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Oregon Health Policy and Research, OHSU Center for Health System Effectiveness, Oregon Healthcare Workforce Institute. "The projected demand of physicians, nurse practitioners, and physicians assistants in Oregon: 2013-2020". 2/2014.