



April 15, 2015

To: House Committee on Health Care
From: Health Care for All Oregon

Re: Support of HB 3517

Chair Greenlick and Committee Members,

Health Care for All Oregon (HCAO) urges the passage of HB 3517. We believe that providing health care to all children in the state is a moral and ethical imperative. We also believe that ensuring that all children have effective access to health care will save the state money on health care expenditures while adding to the economic vitality of the state.

HCAO is a statewide coalition of 110 organizations and local chapters, who organize and advocate for a system of universal publicly funded, high quality health care in Oregon and nationally. We take the position that health care is a human right. That position was shared by 77% of Oregon voters in a recent poll. We define that right in terms of six values that should characterize a health care system: Universality, Equity, Accountability, Transparency, Participation, and health care as a Public Good.

Of these values, universality and equity are the most central and the most relevant to HB 3517. While HCAO strives for true, full universality in the health care system, we also support partial movements toward that goal. HB 3517, by enabling children not eligible for public insurance or subsidies under the ACA and current law governing the Oregon Health Plan to get access to timely and effective care, advances the value of universality.

While moral and ethical considerations alone demand that all children in Oregon be provided effective access to health care, we also know that covering all children is good fiscal and economic policy.

Obstructed access by children to health care due to family inability to pay is costly. Health problems that can be prevented by regular primary care and diseases and injuries that have simple, effective, lower cost treatments if dealt with promptly, become hugely expensive when care is delayed. Children excluded from public and subsidized insurance eventually get care, but often by the most expensive, least effective route, hospital emergency departments. Hospitals shift costs of uncompensated care onto the public budget or into the prices they charge private insurers and the OHP. Meanwhile children experience avoidable suffering and ill health, sometimes even death. They develop avoidable chronic health conditions the costs of which come back to us all. They fail to grow and thrive to their fullest potential. The stresses of illness and worry about sick children contribute to ill health in their families and communities. All of this is sheer waste, and bad stewardship of public resources.

Other testimony you will receive focuses on the economic benefits of good child health for Oregon. HCAO supports that testimony. However, here we wish to point out the feedback relationships among health, education, and income. Public health epidemiology shows us that low income is the largest social determinant of ill health. If Oregon fails to support the health care of all our children, ill health will harm their ability to learn, and their eventual productivity and ability to earn adequate incomes as adults, harming health in more families and communities, in a vicious cycle whose costs come back to the state.

Conversely, wise public spending to support the health of all children creates a virtuous cycle of lower costs, less pain and suffering, stronger education, and happier children able to develop themselves better to their fullest adult potential.

Please pass HB 3517. It's the right thing to do and wise public policy.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Mercer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Lee Mercer, President
Health Care for All-Oregon (HCAO)