



House Interim Health Care Committee 2-1-16

HB 4071 COFA Premium Assistance Program

Testimony of John Mullin

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Mr. Chair, members of the Committee, my name is John Mullin, representing the Oregon Law Center. I am pleased to have this opportunity to submit testimony in favor of HB 4071, the COFA Premium Assistance bill. I realize that committee members are well versed about the issue of the Compact of Free Association (COFA) population. In adding my perspective, I would just note that the Oregon Law Center's mission is "access to justice for Oregon's low income communities."

In addition to the excellent testimony you will hear today, I will simply state that access to justice for this population has a long and checkered history, going back to treaties during World War II, the nuclear testing after the War, and the exclusion of federal benefits, including Medicaid, with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (aka, "Welfare Reform") in 1996. When Medicaid match was no longer available to states, Oregon chose not to cover the COFA population, along with Legally Present Residents (LPR). It is time to take the steps to cover these populations, beginning with the passage of HB 4071.

I have testified many times before this committee about the Basic Health provisions under the Affordable Care Act, which would allow for greater affordability, as well as the coverage of COFA and LPR populations. Although there will be a Basic Health Bill this session (HB 4017), it is important to distinguish between the two bills. HB 4071 can provide more immediate assistance to the COFA population. Basic Health, or a similar approach, would not be ready to go, under the most favorable circumstances, until next biennium.

In conclusion, I would just add that I am one of the founders of the Inclusion, Affordability, and Innovation coalition. As I often say, our values are in our name. We are very supportive of HB 4071, and we encourage your support. In my opinion, this bill is an opportunity to not only serve the COFA population, but also do what is right for people who have been treated unfairly.

Thank you for your consideration.