

April 14, 2017

Dear Chair Greenlick and Members of the House Committee on Health Care,

My name is Chloë Hughes and I am a Professor of Teacher Education at Western Oregon University where I have worked since 2003. I'm writing to express my grave concerns about House Bill 3428. I urge you to oppose this bill that I believe will not only have a dramatic effect on health care options, but will also have a significant effect on the recruitment and retention of quality educators in Oregon.

It is my understanding that if HB 3428 passes, the majority of public employees in Oregon would be enrolled in coordinated care organizations (CCOs) that contract with the Oregon Health Authority, the agency responsible for administering Medicaid through CCOs in Oregon through the Oregon Health Plan (OHP). This will greatly limit and weaken health care options for educators.

As you may know, compensation for faculty and staff who work in Higher Education in Oregon is low when compared to other states--even those with similar costs of living. At Western Oregon University, salaries are particularly low. Like my colleagues, I never hoped to become wealthy through my profession but one reason they and I have tolerated multiple years of budget cuts, salary cuts, salary freezes and furlough days, was the promise that we would continue to have access to stable and comprehensive healthcare. Because of exacting teaching loads and the need to teach flexible hours to fit around our (mainly first-generation and minority) students' schedules, I need to live close to campus, and my home is in Monmouth. Options for quality healthcare in this area are already a great deal less plentiful than in a large urban area. Many of my colleagues, perhaps as a result of the stress of working in a grossly underfunded education system, have experienced serious health care problems in recent years. The passing of this bill would mean losing access to health care experts who might be able to save their lives. I believe all educators would have fewer options for quality health care, would need to travel further to new healthcare providers and would not be eligible for the same level of services. Further, my colleagues and I often have to travel out of state and sometimes internationally in order to do our jobs--not only to present research at conferences, but also to serve the larger community, and to keep current in our disciplines. Such travel is a condition for promotion and tenure; what will we do if we have the misfortune to need medical care while we are traveling out of the service area simply fulfilling conditions of our employment?

I have served on multiple searches for new faculty during my tenure at Western Oregon University. More than half of those searches have failed-- mainly owing to our low salaries and heavy workloads. In the searches that have been successful and where faculty have stayed more than a year, one reason for their recruitment and retention has been the promise of comprehensive health care benefits. If this bill passes, future searches for faculty and staff will be even more likely to fail at my institution, which is known for preparing excellent K-12 teachers. We live in a persistent education 'crisis' in Oregon and for many a career in education

has become extremely unattractive. The demands placed upon educators at all levels have become untenable and, in an era of ever-changing OARs combined with constant budget cuts, even those who do this job for the public good rather than for a decent wage are beginning to wonder whether they can continue. There is a looming teacher shortage, K-12 class sizes are high, and graduation rates are low. What are the plans in the Legislature, if Oregon fails to recruit and retain the talented educators that the state badly needs and our children deserve?

Please oppose HB 3428. The bill is ill-considered, ill-timed, and will surely keep Oregon's education system in a state of permanent ill-health.

Respectfully yours,

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