



HJR 203: Oregon Constitutional amendment obligating the state to ensure access to health care
Testimony to Senate Committee on Healthcare – Dr. Edith Rusch – 2. 19.2018

Tax Fairness Oregon believes a state has an obligation to attend to healthcare access for its citizens, but we do not support enshrining that obligation in the constitution. We openly campaigned for approval of Ballot Measure 101 so, obviously, TFO believes in access to quality healthcare. But HJR 203 is written with such glittering generalities that it is misleading, politically charged and potentially harmful to the well-being of this state.

Our concern is in the language of section 47: *“It is the obligation of the state to ensure that every resident of Oregon has access to cost-effective, medically appropriate and affordable health care as a fundamental right.”*

We want someone to answer the question, “And then what. . . .?”

Are legislators prepared to spend multiple legislative sessions arguing over the innumerable interpretations and definitions for “ensure”, “cost effective”, “medically appropriate” and “affordable”? Please remember that the ACA suggestion for *end of life discussions with your doctor* was redefined as *death panels*.

Are Oregonians and their legislators prepared to live with the same choices we faced when Measure 5 was enacted? That constitutional amendment was financed by redirecting funding for social services and higher education. Until that point, Oregon was well-known for outstanding social services and today we are faced with embarrassing audits of our foster care system.

A constitutional requirement will force impossible choices once again. The deterioration of Oregon’s child-care systems, mental health programs, roads, bridges, affordable housing, and shortened school years all emanated from voter approved changes to the constitution.

To be clear, Tax Fairness Oregon fights for fair and equitable tax policies that serve the common good. We supported Measure 101 because we know that healthier children have better school attendance, we know that healthier employees are more productive employees, and we are convinced that the Oregon Health Plan serves a common good.

HJR 203 speaks to a common need—health care, but it does not serve a common good. We plead with you to make your decision after thinking carefully about **“and then what. . . .?”**

We read the bills and follow the money