

*Focusing Together on Health*



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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Ways & Means subcommittee regarding HB 5011.

My name is Eric Griffith and I'm the Executive Director of Northeast Oregon Network (NEON)- a non-profit working to improve the health and wellbeing of those living in our rural corner of Oregon. NEON has a department of application assisters that work with community members across three counties in Northeast Oregon. Our department consists of three very busy individuals working very hard to bridge the gap between those that do not have health insurance provided by an employer and assistance made available by the Affordable Care Act. The largest funding source supporting this very necessary team of assisters comes from a grant provided by the Department of Consumer and Business Services. Without this funding, our region would significantly lack the resource to help Oregonians in this region to successfully navigate the health insurance system.

In the rural and frontier counties we serve, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, lack of stable housing, poverty, unemployment, educational attainment and health literacy play a role in the barriers that arise for Oregonians navigating complex application and follow up processes. Our team of assisters is very experienced and attend multiple trainings annually to be able to provide no-cost and high-quality assistance for both the Oregon Health Plan and Qualified Health Plans through the market place. Often one family will need to navigate both systems within a calendar year, depending on qualifying events, such as loss of employment, or birth of a child. Both systems are prohibitively complex for the average resident. Even with our highly trained staff, there are often examples of families needing lots of assistance to work through complications that occur in the process. This can mean hours of work from one of our staff with a single family. Without assistance, I am confident these complicated situations would fall through the cracks, leaving vulnerable populations without access to affordable healthcare. Moreover, without assistance, many families and individuals wouldn't know where to begin the process.

I encourage the subcommittee to continue funding this very needed work. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimonial.

Sincerely,

Eric Griffith

**Executive Director**

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