

March 22, 2019

The Honorable Laurie Monnes Anderson
Chair, Senate Committee on Health Care
State Capitol, Room 453
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Minority Health Institute opposes SB 900

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

On behalf of the Minority Health Institute, I write in strong opposition to Senate Bill 900. As a physician, I believe I have a moral and ethical obligation to voice concern when I become aware of proposed legislation that could endanger patient health. As the founder and president of the Minority Health Institute, a nonprofit organization that serves the national public interest, I also believe it is my duty to raise alarm when I find legislation that would harm the health of minority patients, who already suffer daily from a lack of access to health care. SB 900 unfortunately fits both of these categories.

If passed, SB 900 would severely limit the ability of charitable organizations to provide financial assistance to dialysis patients in need. These are longstanding charitable organizations whose financial assistance allows for access to treatment for so many people suffering from kidney failure in Oregon, including many minority patients. For these patients, charitable assistance is the reason they are able to continue paying for their costly and life-sustaining dialysis treatment.

Dialysis takes a toll on patients both mentally and physically. It is extremely time-consuming, requiring many patients to receive treatment in a clinic for upwards of three hours a day, three times per week. These pressures push many patients out of work, forcing them to rely on outside assistance to maintain insurance payments for their treatment. Income disparities between ethnicities place minority patients at an even bigger disadvantage in these situations, with many lacking necessary savings or family members who are able to financially aid them in emergency medical situations such as these.

Minorities are at the greatest risk of developing kidney disease and subsequent kidney failure. While research is unclear as to why this is the case, many studies point to higher rates in minority communities of diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and obesity, all of which contribute to kidney disease. Beyond these factors, minorities in the United States suffer greatly from a lack of access to health care in comparison to White Americans. National statistics show that nearly 2 out of 5 Latinos, 1 in 4 Black Americans and 1 in 3 Native Americans lack health insurance. This not only affects preventive care but also treatment of diagnosed diseases and early-stage diagnosis, which is critical to slowing or stopping diseases that can lead to kidney failure.

These unfortunate realities have led to high rates of kidney disease in minority communities and diagnoses at increasingly earlier ages. Large groups of people who already suffer from income disparities and high poverty levels are suddenly met with monthly bills for their dialysis treatment that may never go away, and almost certainly will last their entire lifetime. This is where charitable assistance plays a critical role. It bridges a gap, providing minority patients with financial assistance needed to access quality care. Without charitable assistance, many minority patients' kidney failure would surely go untreated, ultimately leading to death.

When I founded the Minority Health Institute in 1987, my goal was to advance the health and wellness of communities of color and those in financial need. Our mission remains the same today. Unnecessary, flagrant

and misguided legislation such as SB 900 threatens this mission at its core. It threatens the entire dialysis patient population, allowing for patient care and access to treatment to be disregarded.

Patient access to reliable, high-quality care is at stake. SB 900 will cause irreparable harm, reducing access to health care for some of the most vulnerable Oregonians. As a medical professional, it is my duty to alert you to these potential consequences. Please stop SB 900 before it's too late.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Allen Williams, MD, FACC, FAHA, FACP
Founder, President and CEO of the Minority Health Institute