



April 15, 2019

To: Joint Committee on Transportation  
From: Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility  
Re: House Bill 2015: Equal Access to Roads Act

Co-Chair Senator Lee Beyer, Co-Chair Representative Caddy McKeown, and Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

Having access to safely and legally drive is an issue of equality and is an important public health concern. For these reasons, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility supports a current bill in the Oregon House—HB 2015, the “Equal Access to Roads Act”.

At present, in order to obtain a driver’s license in Oregon, one must show a birth certificate or passport. This is a huge barrier for populations such as undocumented immigrants, individuals who are homeless/houseless, domestic violence victims, seniors, and others who for a variety of reasons cannot produce papers to prove their citizenship status.

HB 2015 would allow Oregon residents who have met the following criteria to get a standard driver’s license: Being of driving age, passing the written and driving tests, paying the license fees, able to prove their identity and Oregon residency, regardless of US citizenship status.

We know that in this culture, driving is often a necessity, not a luxury. Access to driving enables people to maintain a job and a livelihood, transport their children to and from school, sports and other activities which keep them active, healthy and connected to the community. In addition, the ability to drive helps families attend their places of worship. Having access to drive greatly reduces barriers to getting medical and dental care on a regular and timely basis. Delays in accessing health care results in people getting sicker and having to rely on urgent and costly trips to emergency rooms. The 2017 Colorado Health Access Study found that 5.5% of Coloradans (or 300,000 people) did not get the (health) care they needed because they lacked transportation to the doctor’s office or the doctor’s office was too far away.

Other health choices are limited when one does not have access to driving. There is less ability to obtain healthy foods, live and work in a place of one’s choice, and one is less able to be connected to the community causing families to be more isolated. It is widely known that community connections and involvement are important in achieving good health and add to the likelihood of greater economic success.

As health workers who care about the safety of our roads, it is important that all who drive do so having taken the driving test and obtaining a driver’s license. This is one very basic way of assuring that drivers know the laws of the road and have a level of driving proficiency.

In addition, drivers without licenses lack auto insurance. This also puts the public at risk as it increases the chances of hit and run accidents (due to fear of being caught without a license and insurance). In states where laws such as HB 2015 have been enacted, there has been a decrease in hit and run traffic accidents and the rate of insured drivers has increased.

There are many stories of the obstacles that not having a driver’s license places in the lives of families trying to make a living, support their children to attend school and activities, wanting to attend their place of worship, and not being able to get to health care—even in an emergency. Imagine having to take a sick infant to the hospital emergency room by bus

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because of the inability for the parent to get a driver's license. Access to driving is something many of us take for granted. There is a lack of basic equality when one is denied that access simply due to inability to prove their citizenship status.

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility urges our state representatives to support HB 2015, and, for the sake of the public's health, we urge the passage of this bill by the entire OR legislature.

Sincerely,

Maxine Fookson, PNP

Peace Working Group Member of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

On behalf of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

