



February 13, 2020

To: The House Health Care Committee

From: Michele Ruffin, Oregon Political Director, Forward Together Action

Re: Support of HB 4116

Dear Chair Salinas and Members of the Committee,

Forward Together Action is an affiliated organization of Forward Together, which is in its 30<sup>th</sup> year of organizing, movement building and power building for communities of color. Forward Together Action pushes for the changes needed to create systems that serve all of us. We know that when women of color, gender nonconforming people and Indigenous communities lead---and lawmakers listen--- we all win. I am writing to you today in support of a bill that would expand access to life-saving HIV prevention medication and I hope that you'll vote to support this important concept.

Nearly 275 people are diagnosed with HIV in Oregon each year. Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, or PrEP, is a medication that can prevent HIV infection when taken daily. When taken correctly, PrEP is 92-99% effective in reducing HIV risk. Post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP, is a medication used after a recent exposure to HIV.

Unfortunately, access to PrEP and PEP is limited. Of the estimated 1 million Americans who are most at risk of contracting HIV, fewer than 10 percent are actually using the medication. We also know that because of structural racism and a lack of access to affordable and comprehensive health care, it is Black and Latino communities most at risk for contracting HIV. In fact, the rate of Black women living with an HIV diagnosis in Oregon is 11 times the rate of white women.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://aidsvu.org/local-data/united-states/west/oregon/>



Behind the counter access to PrEP and PEP will align Oregon with national standards of care, ensure timely access to care, and closing a loophole in current law that can stick patients with the full cost of a consultation with a pharmacist for these medications. When we know that any one of us, and community members, can go to our local pharmacist and consult with them about these life-saving medications, it can make a real difference.

Please support the expansion of access to PrEP and PEP by voting yes on HB 4116.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Political Director

Forward Together Action