



Oregon School Employees Association

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Senate Committee on Health Care
Sen. Deb Patterson, chair

Dear Chair Patterson and committee members:

The Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) represents about 23,000 workers in nearly all levels of public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, ESDs and community colleges. OSEA members perform many of the thankless tasks that keep Oregon public schools safe and functional for students, administrators and teachers.

Health care affordability is a critical priority for OSEA and for all Oregon workers. Although our members are typically covered by Oregon Educators Benefit Board health plans, many of the workers we represent do not receive enough hours to qualify for benefits. Senate Bill (SB) 844 and the creation of the Oregon Prescription Drug Affordability Board is urgently needed and will benefit all of Oregon's working families.

Since March of last year, when schools were closed down to slow the spread of Covid-19, our members have faced lots of uncertainty – including their personal health, safety, and financial well-being. One thing we never want our members to worry about is how they can make ends meet – especially when it comes to the price of their prescription drugs. As the cost of these medications continue to rise unchecked, our members are literally paying the price. Bottom line: big pharmaceutical companies like that arrangement.

For far too long, pharmaceutical companies have used a lack of regulation to their advantage – claiming they are not part of the problem while they spend more on advertising than on the research and development critical to developing new drugs. That, coupled with our federal government's failure to keep the pharmaceutical industry in check, has placed an unfair burden on working Oregonians. Passing SB 844 will place a much needed level of scrutiny on an industry that cares more about profits than consumers.

Once established, the Oregon Prescription Drug Affordability Board will take aim at the skyrocketing cost of critical life-saving medications and identify costs that have excessively increased without reasonable cause. By doing this, Oregon can join other states that have put consumers first and taken similar steps to limit how much people pay for certain medications. This approach will drive down prescription costs for all Oregonians, including the education workers that are currently working hard to help our schools and students recover from the pandemic.

OSEA strongly urges the members of this committee to move SB 844 to the floor with a “do pass” recommendation. We can begin to rein in out-of-control drug prices for Oregon consumers and this is the way to do it.

Thank you for your attention,

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