



Virginia Garcia Memorial
HEALTH CENTER

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TO: Co-Chair Johnson, Co-Chair Steiner Hayward, Co-Chair Rayfield, Vice-Chair Girod, Vice-Chair Gomberg, Vice-Chair Smith and members of the Joint Ways and Means committee

FR: Juan Franco, Policy and Advocacy Officer
Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center

RE: **Support for Cover All People (HB 2164 and HB 3352)**

We write to voice our strong support of House Bills 2164 and 3352 to extend health care coverage to income-qualified, uninsured adults.

Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center provides high quality, culturally appropriate health care to more than 52,000 patients every year that live and work in Washington and Yamhill counties. For more than 45 years, we have offered primary, dental, pharmacy and behavioral and mental health services. We work every day to address and remove the barriers that prevent those most at risk from receiving the care they need.

COVID-19 fundamentally changed the way we deliver care to vulnerable individuals in our community. The COVID-19 positivity rate of our patient population has consistently been at least 3-4 times higher than the Oregon average, partly because adults who are uninsured often avoid or delay accessing needed care or medication because of the financial barriers our patients face leading to their choosing care or keeping their families housed and fed. Of the 52,000 patients we serve, 1 in 4 are uninsured.

The coronavirus brought to light the deep disparities communities of color experience every day, built on a lifetime systemic racism. Barriers these populations face daily – food access, affordable housing, anti-immigration policies – were magnified in their intensity, creating an ever-widening chasm between the availability of services and access to them. For communities of color, the unequal access to the resources and opportunities that facilitate health and wellness forces them to choose between accessing care or providing food and shelter for their family.

As advocates of racial, social and health justice, we know each of you understand the importance of making investments to overcome the disparities caused by systemic racism. We are encouraged to see that one of the specific goals listed in the budget is to “minimize disruptions in the care continuum of care in core programs that serve Oregon’s most vulnerable citizens,” knowing it creates a path for Oregonians who to access the care they need.

As the second largest federally qualified health center in our the state, we serve communities where one in four people are uninsured. We know that extending access to comprehensive health insurance for all adults would significantly improve the health and well-being of the communities we serve and that covering all people strengthens our economy by addressing lost wages due to illness and saves taxpayer dollars by reducing emergency room care, housing insecurity, and disruptions to student learning.

No Oregonian should need to choose between seeking care or keeping their families housed and fed. Extending health care coverage to ALL Oregonians is a critical step towards ensuring health equity. Demonstrating our commitment to eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities requires us to recognize that providing access to comprehensive health insurance for all adults is a vital and foundational part of eliminating health disparities.

On behalf of Virginia Garcia, I urge you to support this bill and begin creating systems where all communities have the opportunity to thrive and pursue better health outcomes.