



February 9, 2021

To: The House Health Care Committee

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

Re: Support of HB 2362

Dear Chair Prusak and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michele Ruffin and I am the political director of Forward Together Action, a multi-issue organization working with Black, Indigenous Women of Color and Non-Binary people to push for the systems change we need for all families to thrive. 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 prove an important step in making sure that affordable and quality health care are embedded into the growing number of mergers and acquisitions we see happening.

Healthcare company and services consolidation has been increasing nationally in recent years, and as an organization that serves community members and hears stories of increasing costs to families, this is concerning for the kind of outcomes we see.

In recent years, we've seen from national surveys that Oregon is one of a handful of states where the percentage of adults going without care continues to rise due to costs. Another recent national survey found that more than one-third of Hispanic adults and nearly 3 in 10 Black adults with pre-pandemic incomes below the federal poverty level reported that they were worse off financially in September than they were before the pandemic in March.¹

¹ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103105/uneven-recovery-leaves-many-hispanic-black-and-low-income-adults-struggling.pdf>



The other concerning issue is that consolidation can lead to restrictions on reproductive, gender-affirming and end-of-life care when partnerships in acquisitions do not explicitly account for this type of care in their current coverage. In Oregon, we have a tradition of honoring the decisions patients make. Mergers with religiously affiliated hospitals and insurers puts this fundamental right at risk—by telling patients and doctors that the religious affiliation of their healthcare provider is more important than the personal decisions made by patients about their healthcare.

Bigger does not necessarily mean better quality care, and because of this, we see an opportunity for a critical intervention in Oregon. House Bill 2362 provides an avenue for us to place patients at the center of all proposed healthcare deals, not profits or large private equity. This bill provides a process for proposed healthcare mergers, acquisitions and affiliations throughout Oregon's marketplace to ensure that transactions enhance access to low-cost, quality care services.

I urge you to vote yes on HB 2362 and thank you for your consideration and time today.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Political Director

Forward Together Action