

My name is Rachael Atchison and I am a retired public servant who lives in Salem.

I spent my career as a firefighter and paramedic in a busy urban department and there was rarely a shift where I did not bear witness to the dysfunction and cruelty of our healthcare system. Many people put off seeking primary care, and it was only when their symptoms were unbearable or when they were critically ill that they would receive treatment in the streets or in an emergency room. I responded to diabetics who were acidotic and unconscious because they couldn't afford insulin; asthmatics in respiratory distress because they couldn't afford their inhalers; and severe allergic reactions in people who couldn't afford Epipens. I was often in a position of trying to convince people who, worried about cost, were refusing treatment for life or limb threatening traumatic injuries. While my department instructed me not to discuss billing matters, I would often find myself saying things like "everything else but your health is replaceable" and "our health is the most important thing". I heard stories from people who had lost their insurance because they lost their job and about others who had lost their homes after a cancer diagnosis. Folks were so much sicker than they needed to be, and the unnecessary suffering was both heartbreaking and infuriating. I promised myself that when I retired I would work as hard as I could for a truly universal system.

So for me, it's a moral issue. I don't believe there should be haves and have-nots. For those who somehow approve of our current system or condone it through inaction, I have a question: Who is it that should not receive the care they need? Is it your family or your neighbor's family? Is it black and brown people? Is it restaurant workers or the people who grow and pick your food? Is it poor people or the disabled or homeless? Who, exactly, should not have health care in this country? If it's hard to name names, as I hope it is, then I think this illustrates why healthcare should be acknowledged as a human right. Our state can step up and do just that with SJR12 and I am a strong supporter of the bill. I look forward to being able to vote this in alongside my fellow Oregonians.