

May 4, 2021

To the Oregon House Committee on Healthcare, in support of SJR12 2021:

Now more than ever, Oregonians desperately need guaranteed access to affordable, cost-effective and clinically appropriate health care.

Last March my active, middle-aged husband contracted COVID-19. He became seriously ill, though not quite sick enough to be hospitalized. And after a few frightening weeks he seemed to be improving. But have you read about so-called “long haulers,” who continue to suffer from life altering symptoms for months after being infected with COVID-19? Tragically, my husband turned out to be a long hauler. His health declined to the point where he couldn’t stand for long without collapsing. He suffered from constant “brain fog,” unable to focus. After months of doctor appointments and regularly missed work, he lost his job.

I realize we were actually quite fortunate. My husband remains unable to work even now, a year later—but he is starting to show real improvement. I was able to transition to working from home, and to add him to my health insurance. Most importantly: he survived! But I can’t help but imagine: Where would we be if we hadn’t had insurance at the outset? Or if I wasn’t able to add him to my employer’s insurance plan?

Our experience has opened my eyes to the crucial need for guaranteed access to health care. And for many Oregonians, that access remains tied to employment. In these times of widespread, potentially debilitating illness and economic uncertainty, too many of my neighbors have lost their health insurance. Many are unable to afford it without an employer’s subsidizing some of the cost and therefore go without. What about all those who caught COVID-19 but lacked insurance? If they did require hospitalization, the debts could crush them. Not to mention those who suffer from any number of other conditions requiring expensive, life-saving treatments, surgeries or medications. One tragic illness or injury could financially destroy a family, and that is simply unacceptable.

I urge you to move this bill forward, through the House Committee on Healthcare and to eventual passage and inclusion in our great state’s Constitution. It isn’t hyperbole to say that access to affordable, cost-effective and clinically appropriate health care can mean the difference between life and death.