

From the Desk of: *Andrea Salinas*

March 2, 2022

Re: Support of HB 4035 (2022) and a Public Option for Oregon

Dear President Courtney, Speaker Rayfield, and members of the Oregon State Legislature,

As the 2022 legislative session is nearing its end, we, the undersigned organizations, want to impress upon you the importance of HB 4035 to the future of healthcare policy in Oregon. The bill provides OHA with the ability to develop a Medicaid redetermination process and help 1.4 million Oregonians maintain coverage when the federal COVID-19 public health emergency and related continuous coverage provisions end. Without action, 300,000 Oregonians could be left without affordable coverage when they are determined ineligible for Medicaid. Moreover, the bill establishes a task force to create a low-cost, high-quality bridge plan for Oregonians losing coverage when they stop qualifying for Medicaid. All of these measures help to ensure the recent coverage gains and historically low rates of uninsurance are maintained.

A bridge plan for this population is a good first step to providing low-cost, high-quality coverage for all Oregonians. We know that Oregonians at all income levels struggle with health care costs, from premiums and deductibles to medical bills. A study of 2019 bankruptcies found medical debt in every income level and every region where bankruptcies were filed. We have heard from Oregonians sharing their experiences with health care costs: individuals switching from silver to bronze plans because the premiums were too high, and small businesses struggling to offer health benefits to employees. The development of a bridge plan would provide dependable, affordable coverage that, similar to a public health insurance option, leverages a state's existing unique infrastructure and health care system. We encourage the legislature to ensure that the bridge plan task force has appropriate and diverse representation that includes participants representing the range of stakeholders who could be impacted by the bridge plan.

While we support HB 4035 and the task force, we must do more. We have all experienced the time pressures of the short legislative session, and we know that there are limits to what can be accomplished in a month. However, we hope that the bridge plan remains part of a larger discussion to lower costs for all Oregonians through a public health insurance option. We look forward to engaging with the bridge plan task force and working with the legislature during the interim in order to bring forward a complementary public option bill in 2023.

Sincerely,

A Public Option for Oregon Coalition

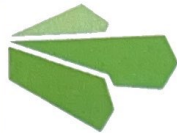
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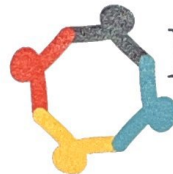
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