

Submitter: Peter Buckley  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Health Care  
Measure: HB4035

Chair Prusak and Members of the Committee-

My name is Peter Buckley, I'm a former state representative (2005 to 2017) from District 5 in south Jackson County, which is now very ably represented by your colleague, Pam Marsh. I'm writing to offer my strong support to the proposals being made by the Oregon Health Authority to address the challenges with the Redeterminations process for Medicaid eligibility.

Since leaving the legislature, I have been working with Southern Oregon Success, a collaboration of all levels of education, health care, mental health care, human services, public safety and workforce development in Jackson and Josephine counties. The focus of our collaboration, to put it as simply as possible, is strong families and thriving children. As part of our work to support and expand the early childhood workforce, we've had to confront the fact that the vast majority of child care and preschool providers do not have the resources to be able to offer their employees health care through their jobs. Our early learning hub, Southern Oregon Early Learning Services (SOELS), a key partner in our collaboration, found through a survey that less than 25% of early childhood workers had health care benefits. And this was prior to the pandemic.

All of you are aware of the tremendous impact COVID has had on child care and early childhood educators. A recent study from Oregon State University reports that at present, every county in our state--bar none--is considered a child care desert. We are desperate to recruit and maintain an adequate child care workforce. Child care workers and other workers who serve children and families have been called "essential workers" during the pandemic. They are more than essential now--they are vital. We simply must have the child care and early childhood education services Oregon families need for our families, children, small businesses and economy can thrive.

So the issue of how the Redetermination process takes place becomes crucial. We are just starting to make progress in raising the wages for this vital workforce, and we have to address health care needs at the same time. An abrupt Redetermination process that eliminates a significant number of workers making between 138% and 200% of the federal poverty level could severely damage all efforts towards addressing the workforce needs in early childhood and other essential workplaces. What the OHA is proposing provides the much needed time to do the Redetermination and to develop a smart and effective process to ensure that early

childhood workers and other essential workers who now make over 138% of the federal poverty level do not lose their health care. Increased wages and solid health care coverage are what we need to even have a chance to recruit and maintain the workforce we need.

I greatly appreciate your time and consideration, and I urge your support of the OHA proposal for HB 4035. If the legislature does choose to move forward with an option to include a process which includes community input and planning, which I hope you do, I would be glad to participate any way I can to assist.