



Testimony in Support of House Bill 4035

House Committee on Health Care

February 9, 2022

Russell Lum

Chair Prusak, Vice-Chairs Hayden and Salinas, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to enter testimony, I am Russell Lum, political organizer for Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). We represent roughly 15,000 nurses, including RNs and advanced practice nurses, and allied health workers. Nurses are the largest segment of Oregon's health care workforce, and are fully invested in health care reform efforts to expand access to care for Oregonians and reduce health disparities. Oregon Nurses Association and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon support HB 4035, due to its thoughtful approach to Medicaid redetermination and its adoption of a state-based marketplace (SBM), which we find a prudent step on the path to a public option for Oregon.

As to Medicaid redetermination, the potential loss of coverage for as many as 300,000 Oregonians when the public health emergency ends is an urgent problem. The HB 4035 framework is admirably multifaceted and makes a commitment of not abandoning vulnerable Oregonians in a particularly destabilizing time of OHP churn.

HB 4035 will also support the transition to a state-based marketplace (SBM), which ONA supports as a critical step towards moving Oregon to a public option and eventually health coverage for all.

Access to an affordable health insurance plan is out of reach for many. Health care costs have continued to rise, a burden felt even more acutely by those who are uninsured. According to the 2019 Oregon Health Insurance Survey, uninsured Oregonians were more than twice as likely to report delaying care due to cost (35%) as compared to insured Oregonians (14%).¹ Lack of access to care can have significant and long-lasting effects on individuals, families, and communities, and perpetuate already existing health inequities. A public option — a state-sponsored insurance plan for those who do not qualify for federal coverage through Medicaid or Medicare but cannot afford commercial health insurance coverage — would help provide vital coverage to those who fall in this gap.

In 2021, the legislature demonstrated its support for exploring what the implementation of a public option would look like in our state, which resulted in the creation of the Public Option

Implementation Report. Oregon Nurses Association supports the Oregon Health Authority's implementation plan framework, which, among other features, includes a recommendation to transition to a state-based marketplace as an intermediary step towards making a public option available by 2025. The transition to a state-based marketplace would allow Oregon greater flexibility and autonomy in designing a system to better meet the needs of Oregonians, lower costs, and pave the way for greater access to care through a public option. We ask the legislature to embrace the steps of HB 4035, which across a range of approaches help Oregon more deeply invest in affordable, comprehensive, and equitable health care coverage.

1. Health Equity and Cost Containment, Oregon Health Policy Board (OHPB). October 6, 2020. Available here: https://www.oregon.gov/oha/OHPB/MtgDocs/5.%20Health%20Equity%20and%20Cost%20Containment_updated.pdf.