

Submitter: Emily Gibson  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure: SB704

I am telling my story, in support of a universal health care plan for Oregon. I recently experienced the stresses of dealing with a serious chronic illness at the same time as our family lost our employer-based insurance. I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in June, 2021, just a month after my partner resigned from his job in health care. His new job did not come with insurance, and I had to resign my job as a teacher due to my illness. In my district, you have to have worked for 5 years before you can take a leave of absence, and I was two years short of the five. I had significant health care needs. The process of diagnosis and early treatment for my MS would have been out of our ability to cover, without good insurance. We had insurance with Kaiser through my partner's job, so we signed up for Cobra to make sure I could continue care with the medical team I started down the path of MS with. Cobra insurance was more expensive than going to the market to find a plan, but there was no other plan that would allow me to stay with my Kaiser Drs. Our household went from two professionals working, to one. To top it all off, I had to travel 3 hours to see my Drs, get labs done, and other care, because Kaiser does not have services in Central Oregon, where we live. It's a long story, but we used to live in Vancouver, WA, and when we moved to Bend, OR, my partner kept his job in Portland. We were both healthy and rarely needed medical services, so it wasn't a big deal to be so far away from our health coverage hospital. For about a year, I was unable to drive long distances, so my partner had to drive me. With his new work as a travel nurse, scheduling appointments was yet another stressor.

I often think about what the 18 months after my diagnosis would have been like if I had been able to see care providers in my town, instead of being tied to Kaiser facilities 3 hours away.

I wonder what it would have been like to have had access to excellent care anywhere, all along. So when we moved to Bend, we could have established with local medical teams years before I became ill.

I wonder how my healing would have progressed without the additional stressors of trying to maintain insurance and access health care at a time of such personal upheaval.

I think often of what it is like for people who don't have the resources we had, to be able to figure it out and make it work.

I wish everyone had access to the treatments and services they need, at their time of need, at their health care provider of choice.

I am grateful I was able to get the care I needed, though at a great personal cost in time, money, and stress. I am grateful to be doing very well right now.

Please support universal care, so everyone gets the care they deserve as human beings, in Oregon.