

TO: Oregon Senate Committee on Health Care
FROM: Ben Lilley, TransPonder
RE: Support for HB2002

I am asking you to vote yes on HB2002, because gender-affirming health care is life-saving care. This bill will close gaps in insurance coverage of critical care for transgender Oregonians.

I encountered barriers in transgender healthcare due to lack of gender-affirming healthcare coverage in Oregon, which led to my poor healthcare outcomes. Before my bottom surgery (radial forearm flap phalloplasty), my surgeon only approved a small strip of hair on my forearm removed through electrolysis. Because Oregon Health Plans didn't cover hair removal unless it was necessary for surgery, I couldn't afford to remove all of the hair I wanted to.

During the procedure, I had poor circulation in my graft site, but my surgeon couldn't shift the graft because the hair hadn't been removed in those parts. Because of that, I ended up having partial flap loss. I watched as the skin of my new phallus died, blackened, and sloughed off. Two grafts had to be taken from my groin area to replace the dead skin, and the removal of that skin led to a less aesthetically pleasing scrotoplasty. Not only that, but now I'm getting painful electrolysis on my penis to remove the rest of the hair, something I can't get covered with insurance. Did you know electrologists charge more for hair removal on genitals than on arms?

If Oregon Health Plans had covered all gender-affirming care, I wouldn't have lost part of my penis.

Gender affirming hair removal is painful, costly, and the barriers to accessing this care can lead to poor healthcare outcomes and less agency for trans and gender diverse folks. Oregon is a crucial leader on trans health care access for the nation, but gaps in insurance coverage still exist, including electrolysis (hair removal) and facial affirmation surgeries.

These procedures are so much more than 'cosmetic' (as they are seen under Oregon insurance policy). I've shared my personal story about how these simple procedures affected my healthcare outcomes, but they are also important for safety for Oregonians, especially for trans women. Hair removal and facial affirmation surgeries can also help trans women with employment and housing.

You have an opportunity to advance legislation that will be truly life-changing—and lifesaving—for transgender Oregonians like me. Please remember my story when you are voting on this bill, and please vote yes on HB2002.

Thank you,
Bennett A. Brock (Lilley)