

TO: Oregon House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
FROM: Sinclair St. Claire
RE: Support for HB 2002

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chair Goodwin and Nelson, and Committee Members,

I am asking you to vote yes on HB 2002, because gender-affirming health care is life-saving care. This bill will close gaps in insurance coverage of critical care for transgender Oregonians.

It was nearly seven years ago that I made the choice to transition instead of giving in to total despair and walking in front of a train; and part of that calculation was the access to care I had seen friends get in California; where I was living at the time. It's difficult to describe the intensity with which my life changed upon being granted hormone treatment—perhaps the most vivid example is that I was literally seeing colors brighter than I ever had before, because my whole life had been muted and dulled (from emotions, to the sense of belonging in my body, to even the very colors I saw) by the denial of my true self.

When I returned from California to my beautiful home state of Oregon, I was elated that there was continuity in care; access to trans affirming mental and physical healthcare changed my sense of self worth; I embarked on a new career path, in service to others and helping them with informational needs as first a library volunteer, and later as a library professional. For much of this journey, I was reliant on the Oregon Health Plan for access to care, and I can positively assert:

Access to gender affirming care is life-affirming care.

Without the care necessary to change my body to match who I am, I would never have entered into public service; I would not have felt I was worthy enough to help others. It has literally made me a better member of society, and opened up to me a rich and spiritually fulfilling life.

Oregon is already a leader on trans health care access, but gaps in insurance coverage still exist for care that is crucial for many trans people, including electrolysis (hair removal) and facial affirmation surgeries. No one wants to look in the mirror and see something that seems intrinsically incorrect, but that is the everyday life of many transgender people. Access to this care can stop these feelings in their tracks, and let these people get on with their lives in ways that will ultimately benefit not just themselves, but the world around them.

These procedures are seen as “cosmetic” under Oregon insurance policy, but I can assure you that for trans people, these are medically necessary procedures that improve life outcomes for this population. Often the discussion of these issues focusses on personal happiness, but I can say that for myself and others I know, the societal benefits should be as thoroughly touted; people who are at peace with themselves, who have benefited from life-saving care return that care to the world around them.

The burden on trans patients seeking much of gender-affirming care (where it is possible to get it covered by insurance) is that they must prove that they are miserable without that care before they can get it. This is quite the opposite of the preventative care model for almost any other kind of conditions; that aim to keep people from getting to a point of misery—whether from physical illness or mental distress. Access to care like electrolysis and facial affirmation surgeries will bolster the opportunities for trans people to avoid that misery, or alleviate the pain they are already experiencing.

You have an opportunity to advance legislation that will be truly life-changing—and perhaps even lifesaving—for transgender Oregonians like me. Please remember my story when you are voting on this bill, and please vote yes on HB 2002.

Thank you,

Sinclair St. Claire