



Testimony in support of HJR 202

Chair Salinas, Vice Chairs Hayden and Nosse, and members of the committee – I am Charlie Swanson, president of Health Care for All Oregon-Action. I am speaking in support of HJR 202, which would allow Oregon voters the chance to amend our constitution to declare that the state is obligated to ensure that every resident of Oregon has access to cost-effective, clinically appropriate and affordable health care as a fundamental right.

The amendment language protects the public interest in funding public schools and other essential public services, so there need be no worry that other services will suffer if voters put this into our constitution but do not approve sufficient revenue increases to appropriately fund universal healthcare.

You are probably aware that the 2019 legislature established a Task Force on Universal Health Care that is charged with making recommendations on how the state could meet this constitutional obligation (thank you!). A well-designed single payer system would not only meet the state obligation described in this constitutional amendment, it would save Oregonians money and would improve the health and lives of Oregonians.

We expect that Oregon voters will welcome this addition to our constitution. Even with recent advances in health insurance coverage in Oregon, more than 200,000 Oregonians are uninsured, and a much larger number are under-insured. Far too many have deductibles and copays that are too large to be affordable, and as a result too many go without care that could improve their health. This is not just a personal cost, it costs society.

We can afford the obligation that this amendment would put on the state. The RAND study¹ concluded that a universal system following a single payer model could cover all residents without additional costs. We thus have substantial confidence that the state could meet such a constitutional obligation without having Oregonians as a whole spending any more resources.

We can make progress towards an appropriate system without this amendment, but this amendment would likely increase the urgency of the task, and would make it clear that the Task Force on Universal Health Care needs to do its job well.

Please support HJR 202. Let the voters tell you that the state should help us get better health care, for more people – we know it can be done for less money.

¹ Chapin White, Christine Eibner, Jodi L. Liu, Carter C. Price, Nora Leibowitz, Gretchen Morley, Jeanene Smith, Tina Edlund, Jack Meyer. A Comprehensive Assessment of Four Options for Financing Health Care Delivery in Oregon. <http://www.oregon.gov/oha/hpa/Documents/Four-Options-Financing-Health-Care-Delivery-Research-Report.pdf>