

To: House Health Care Committee  
From: Alicia Temple, Oregon Law Center  
Date: February 5, 2020  
Re: HB 4029, Hospital Charity Care and Community Benefits

Chair Salinas and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I respectfully request your support for HB 4029 to provide equitable access to charity care across Oregon and make a small fix to HB 3076 from 2019.

OLC is a non-profit organization that provides free legal help to people struggling to make ends meet. Our mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. We advocate for our clients and for the services and programs that help them to overcome poverty. Access to healthcare and issues of health equity are at the forefront of the needs of our clients. While many of our clients are covered by OHP, some are barred from being eligible due to their immigration status and medical debt is still a serious concern for many.

Oregon has done a lot of work to increase availability of healthcare insurance for individuals but true access depends on more than having insurance, it means being able to receive care without it a lifetime of medical debt. OLC has been actively working to find solutions to unnecessary medical debt for clients for years. Despite Oregon's high rate of insurance, there are a variety of reasons why medical debt is still a significant concern for OLC and Legal Aid Services of Oregon clients, between high deductibles, limited coverage or restrictions to OHP eligibility.

Our clients are very low-income and struggle to keep up with medical debt. OLC applauds this legislature for passing HB 3076 last session: our offices around the state were thrilled to see it enacted into law and look forward to working with clients to qualify for these new financial assistance policies.

HB 4029 makes one small change to HB 3076, to ensure it can be implemented as it was intended in light of recent federal changes. Federal rule changes to the definition of "public charge" has a significant impact on our immigrant communities. It is causing confusion and fear, and is deterring individuals from accessing the services they need because of the potential threat that it will be used against them when they legally adjust their immigration status.

HB 4029 prohibits hospitals from denying charity care to someone who doesn't first apply and get denied by OHP. Applying and being denied for a public benefit puts an individual at risk of being subject to the public charge determination when they adjust their immigration status, even if they never intended to use OHP or wanted to enroll. By removing the requirement that everyone must apply, we can protect the intent of HB 3076 and ensure vulnerable communities can get the health care they need.

We respectfully urge your support of HB 4029.