I grew up in Texas, only having moved to Oregon at the age of 37, three years ago. I was a teen runaway, hobbled for decades economically by my choice to prioritize my own bodily safety. I worked up to three jobs at a time to make ends meet, but never had enough for health care. Medical care was a luxury for other people. My older brother, who had ulcerative colitis from childhood, died at 30 when he had a reaction to his new medication - not from the reaction itself, but because the hospital ejected him after a few days because he didn't have insurance, insurance he could never be approved for because of his pre-existing conditions. I had resigned myself to this way of life, not knowing how gum disease was slowly rotting away the bone of my jaw, or the long term effects of my miscarriage I never sought care for, or how the trauma of my upbringing left me mentally and emotionally scarred. As early as my 20s, I hoped that Death would take me quietly, not leave me thrashing on the floor of my living room, alone, unable to breathe, like it had my brother.

Then I moved to Oregon and got on the OHP. I swallowed my pride and went to see a therapist, who I still see two years later and am overwhelmed by how far I've come in learning how to manage and improve my mental health! I saw a dentist and a periodontist and, after many deep cleanings and some oral surgery, my teeth are in the best shape of my adult life, my health improving overall because I am no longer constantly fighting an infection that had reached my bones. I wept. I fully wept when this journey of medical care started. I turned to my partner and thanked him for bringing me here, to a place I felt like actually wanted me to live. I have been unraveling the part of me that had to believe I wasn't worthy of care, and with every layer shed I am stronger, I am happier, and I am more connected to myself and my loved ones. The positive influence of the OHP has sent ripples through my life and into the lives of the people I care for here, who have also started taking their own mental and physical health more seriously. My community, at first a rag-tag bunch of traumatized, impoverished punks, is growing into a more and more resilient network of people who can care for themselves as well as give back to our greater shared community.

I cannot fathom how much more difficult this whole last year would have been if this journey hadn't begun for me, if I hadn't had the tools and the health to face the quarantine's many challenges. Some of my people haven't been so lucky, as they work for practically peanuts, but still make too much to qualify for OHP. It saddens me deeply to watch people I love have to make the same calculations I did, choosing rent over dental care, food over a gyno visit. For this committee to make the step to ensure medical coverage to ALL residents of Oregon would say to me that I moved to a place that puts people over profits, that understands that HEALTH is wealth, and that we have it within our ability to make Oregon truly rich.

I beg you, please, take this step and let Oregon be an example for the rest of the country, a compassionate tip of the spear, guiding us to a true era of health, wealth, and happiness. There is something incredible waiting for us just on the other side.