

Growing up as a white member of the upper-middle class, healthcare was a given - when I was sick, I went to the doctor. When I was injured, I received care. I was luckily very rarely sick or injured. I have had this same luck most of my life - - but, I now realize, likely due less to luck than to the comfort of my family's economic situation. I entered my profession directly out of graduate school, and as a teacher I am blessed with access to healthcare through my employer, both for me and for my spouse. However, I entered teaching as a 22 year old with an untreated anxiety disorder and without the personal infrastructure to sustain the rate at which I was working. I knew I was burning myself out. After 5 years of teaching and the steady decline of my mental health, when presented with the option to take a leave of absence from my job to care for myself, my number one concern was the loss of my medical coverage. I knew that I needed to take time away or face potentially serious personal, professional, and medical consequences, but I deeply feared being without healthcare. OHP absolutely saved me that year, allowing me to seek out and access treatment for my anxiety and take the time that I needed to reprioritize. I am proud to be finishing my 8th year in the classroom; I could not have done this without access to healthcare. No matter how robust my personal support system, no matter how loving my family, no matter how much time I took away from my job to rest, it was therapy and medical treatment that was the deciding factor in my recovery. While I continue to receive treatment and to refine my own self care routines, now back on employer-sponsored healthcare, I recognize that this is yet another privilege I have access to - a privilege that should be a right. Affordable, effective, and appropriate healthcare cannot be reserved only for those whose lives provided them with a path to it. Affordable, effective, and appropriate healthcare, both physical and mental, MUST be made available to all. We cannot build community if some of our members are hurting. We cannot effectively build community if we are not all cared for. I urge you to adopt this amendment and guarantee every citizen of this incredible state that we call home the right of care.