

2/24/2021

Testimony to Senate Committee on Health Care  
RE: Support for SJR 12 and SB 428  
From: Lee Mercer, Silverton OR

Chair Deborah Patterson, Vice Chair Tim Knopp and Committee Members,

For the record, my name is Lee Mercer. I am a resident of Silverton, a retired business owner and a former President and Board Member of Health Care for All Oregon, a statewide healthcare advocacy organization with over 120-member and endorsing organizations, chapters statewide and with 36,000 supporters in our database.

I wanted to join Health Care For All Oregon (HCAO) (and other groups) in encouraging you to pass SJR 12, the "Hope Amendment," which will give Oregon voters the opportunity to vote on an amendment to the Oregon constitution declaring healthcare to be a fundamental right.

What is enshrined in a constitution should be the values and rights that we agree upon as a society. If our values tell us that health care is a human right and we believe it is a value we need to strive to manifest in our state, shouldn't we put it in the Oregon Constitution? In a 2014 Patinkin Research Strategies poll for HCAO we learned that 77% of Oregonians believe that healthcare is a human right.

If a strong majority of Oregonians believe this, our constitution should reflect it.

For those who argue making health care a fundamental right obligates us to funding we can't afford, consider this- When the founding fathers wrote the US constitution, had they determined every detail of the monetary costs of implementing the rights enshrined in that document? When they said "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity..." had they calculated all the revenue formulas for paying for establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare and securing the blessings of liberty?

Of course not! They were merely setting the goals of our nation, with implementing legislation to follow determining how to organize and pay for achieving those goals.

So, as Oregonians, we should view SJR 12, the "Hope Amendment", as a values statement that we believe everyone in our state should have affordable access to health care. And that, by voting for this measure, we are putting a stake in the ground saying this is where we want to go. And if we work together, having set this as our goal, we can make it happen.

So, again, I urge you to pass SJR 12, the Hope Amendment, and allow the voters of Oregon to express their support for health care as a fundamental right.

And, as the Universal Access to Healthcare Task force is currently working diligently to plan a universal healthcare system in Oregon, and it's work has been slowed by the pandemic, please support SB 428 to extend the work of this task force to move us closer to the goal of healthcare for all in Oregon.

Yours appreciatively,

Lee Mercer  
Silverton, OR