



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Testimony in Support of SB 428**

February 24, 2021

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Knopp, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, Representative for House District 46. I am honored to testify in support of SB 428. I want to also note that I also strongly support SJR 12 the HOPE amendment for all Oregonians and also for Rep. Greenlick. I was privileged to meet Rep Greenlick in 2018 when I was discussing the Portland Clean Energy Fund with other legislators, and I appreciated the way he understood the interconnections between public health and climate justice. I hope to help carry on his legacy.

This Monday, the United States recorded more than 500,000 deaths from COVID-19. Each person lost is more than a statistic - they each have a story and loved ones that they have left behind. For patients who survive this disease, many are left with high medical bills, job insecurity, and ongoing health problems.

This pandemic has highlighted the dire consequences of the structural barriers to accessing healthcare. By tying health care access to employment, workers who are in the margins of our economy struggle most to access reliable, affordable, and consistent access to life-saving care. Our existing health disparities and barriers to accessing health care have made Black, Indigenous, and people of color more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and death.

It doesn't have to be this way. The United States is among the wealthiest nations in the world, and yet, many Americans live with the crippling fear of a health emergency that would spiral their families into debt. Here in Oregon, we know we can and must do better.

Before this pandemic, the Legislature heard from Oregonians who were delaying preventative care until diseases progressed beyond a point where medical intervention can be effective. Stories of people rationing prescriptions, especially costly medicines like insulin, when they can't afford refills. As a community organizer in the district I now represent, I also heard these heartbreaking stories from community members and saw that the high cost of healthcare created obstacles for economic security. Community members are forced to make decisions about whether to pay for medical care or their family's other basic needs like food, rent, and childcare.

The Oregon Legislature passed SB 770 in 2019 to create the Taskforce on Universal Health Care tasked with creating recommendations to address these critical issues. SB 428 extends the sunset on this taskforce to continue this important work and to submit their report to the Legislature. **I urge your support for SB 428. The Legislature must take bold action to address gaps in our healthcare systems. Thank you.**