



White Bird Clinic

10 February 2022

To: Chair Prusak, Vice-Chair Salinas, Vice-Chair Hayden and Members of the House Committee on Health Care

From: Chris Hecht, Executive Coordinator, White Bird Clinic

Re: Support for HB 4035 – redetermination concept

On behalf of White Bird Clinic, I respectfully request your support for HB 4035 and the updated language that will ensure thousands of Oregonians can continue to access health care coverage after the federal COVID-19 public health emergency ends.

White Bird Clinic is one of thirty federally qualified health centers in Oregon, which care for more than 300,000 Oregonians. Founded in 1969, White Bird focuses on serving disenfranchised and under-resourced individuals including those experiencing homelessness.

Over the last two years, Oregon's Medicaid enrollment has grown due in part to the pandemic. As a nation we recognized that access to health care was fundamental to weathering the crisis and eventually moving past it. That is why our federal partners put Medicaid redeterminations for eligibility on hold. That means anyone enrolled in Medicaid could not lose access to their health care coverage during the pandemic. Here in Oregon, we now have the lowest ever uninsured rate in state history.

Today, 1.4 million people have access to comprehensive life-saving health care services through the Oregon Health Plan. At White Bird Clinic, we know that improving access to health care is one of the best instruments we have available to achieve more equitable health outcomes while at the same time increasing efficiency and decreasing overall costs to the health care delivery system. Federally qualified health centers like White Bird have been found to be effective in terms of cost and quality due to their community accessibility and ability to furnish timely and high-quality comprehensive integrated health care services in a culturally responsive manner.

The public health emergency will expire on April 16, 2022 absent further federal action. When the public health emergency expires, the Oregon Health Authority will begin a twelve-month process to redetermine the eligibility of all 1.4 million Oregonians currently enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan. This means that many will lose access to life-saving health care coverage leaving them without options to access critical health care services.

Oregon's usual redetermination process will likely result in a loss of health care coverage for hundreds of thousands of Oregonians – who can least afford it. For working Oregonians who earn between 138 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level, buying coverage on the Exchange is out of reach. These individuals and families will become uninsured and their health care needs will go unsupported. We can do better! That is why we support the proposed new language in HB 4035 that would:

- Develop an affordable bridge or basic health plan for Oregonians who earn between 138 and 200 percent of the federal poverty line.
- Invest in outreach and enrollment activities that we know work such as community health workers, community navigators, outreach and enrollment workers, and the state's ONE system

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for the policy concepts stated above and we hope this legislature will take bold action to adopt these principles.

Chris Hecht