



February 17, 2022

Oregon House Committee On Rules

RE: 2/17 Public Hearing and Support for HB 4035 A

Dear Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bill 4035 that “requires Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to study and make recommendations for options to improve access to or lower cost of health care in Oregon.” While we know that many provisions of this bill are still being finalized, we appreciate the opportunity to weigh in based on our experience from other states also working to ensure their residents have access to high-quality, affordable health care.

United States of Care is a non-partisan, non-profit organization working to ensure everyone has access to quality, affordable health care, regardless of health status, social need, or income. We work in states across the country to develop pragmatic policy solutions that meet the needs of people and have been engaged in efforts to advance and implement public health insurance options, as well as other efforts to expand access to coverage and improve affordability. United States of Care is unique in its commitment to advancing policies that are designed to respond to the needs of people. We have seen through [our research](#) that the high cost of care is the biggest issue of concern to people, even when you consider varying demographics, geography, and ideologies. The high cost of care impacts every part of people’s experience with the health care system, from rising premiums to high deductibles and cost-sharing.

### **Support for HB 4035 and Improvements to the Medicaid Redetermination Process**

To that end, United States of Care supports the framework and goals of HB 4035 to improve access and lower the cost of health care for Oregonians. [We support many of the provisions in this bill](#), such as establishing processes to ensure people retain coverage when the public health emergency ends and creating a task force to develop a “Bridge Plan” for the populations most at risk of losing coverage. A Bridge Plan would provide dependable, affordable coverage that, similar to a public option, leverages a state’s existing and unique infrastructure and health care system. We believe these are essential first steps to building more long-term solutions that improve Oregon's health care system and laying the foundation for additional policies to be enacted, such as a public health insurance option.

## **Support for the Development of a Bridge Plan**

We believe the concept of a “Bridge Plan” is a promising solution that has great potential for Oregon and we support the innovative approach the Oregon legislature is taking.

### ***Waiver Authority***

We understand that there are ongoing discussions around potential amendments to HB 4035 and we strongly encourage the inclusion of legislative language that explicitly gives OHA the needed flexibility to seek federal waivers that meet the needs of Oregon while also allowing the state to draw down maximum federal funding. It is critical for OHA to assess the benefits and potential drawbacks of designing a program through a federal Medicaid 1115 waiver, 1331 Basic Health Plan waiver, and/or 1332 state innovation waiver, and we support the provisions requiring the task force to make recommendations on how to maximize federal funding. Because there is not yet an analysis on the best waiver approaches to pursue, we believe providing the state with flexible authority to move forward with any of these different types of waivers is a good approach that enables the state to identify the best approach to ensuring continuity of coverage for Oregonians. It also lays the foundation for creating more affordable options for people with incomes above 200% of the Federal Poverty Level in the future, in recognition of the remaining affordability challenges Oregonians have.

### ***Bridge Plan Task Force***

Overall, we are supportive of the proposal to establish a task force charged with creating a bridge plan proposal. We encourage the legislature to ensure that the task force has appropriate and diverse representation that includes participants representing the range of stakeholders who could be impacted by the bridge plan, including small businesses, health care consumers, chronic disease advocates, federally qualified health centers, and consumers who are currently covered by the Oregon Health Plan who may be at risk of losing coverage at the end of the PHE. It is critical that the task force is informed by the experience of individuals who will likely benefit from bridge plan coverage and can speak to their experience navigating coverage options in Oregon. A comprehensive task force will include critical insights into the components of the plan needed to support continuity of coverage for Oregonians.

### **Advancing Efforts to Ensure Continuity and Access**

As these and other policies to improve Oregon’s health care system are explored, we also urge the state to utilize strategies that are tailored to Oregon’s unique needs and health care system/infrastructure. To that end, we continue to see the establishment of a state-based marketplace as critical to meeting the state’s goals, and we appreciate OHA’s commitment to doing so.

Overall, we applaud the Oregon legislature for its commitment to ensuring continuity of coverage and affordability for all Oregonians. As this legislation continues to be refined, please



consider the experts at United States of Care a resource, and if you have any questions regarding these comments, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Liz Hagan  
Director of Policy Solutions  
[ehagan@usofcare.org](mailto:ehagan@usofcare.org)

Caitlin Westerson  
State External Affairs and Partnerships Director  
[cwesterson@usofcare.org](mailto:cwesterson@usofcare.org)