

2/13/22

To: Senate Health Committee

From: Lee Mercer

RE: Support for SB 704

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of SB 704, a bill to establish a Universal Health Plan Governance Board consistent with SB 770 (2019), to finalize a design and implementation plan of a single-payer health system for the review and consideration of the 2025 Legislature and implementation in 2026-2027.

I am a retired business owner and member of Health Care for All Oregon. I was a business owner most of my life owning and operating movie theaters in California and Nevada. In those days the only benefits we could provide our employees were free movies and popcorn.

When I moved to Oregon I worked for Oregon Center for Public Policy, then became Director of Mainstreet Alliance of Oregon, a small business coalition connecting 3,000 businesses statewide. As Main Street Alliance's director, I surveyed mom and pop businesses door-to-door statewide on policy issues impacting small business owners. Over 60% of those surveyed supported a universal single payer type healthcare system.

I later was elected President of Health Care for All Oregon, an organization with statewide chapters which supports universal healthcare with over 30,000 folks statewide in our database. I am now a member of Marion Polk County chapter of HCAO. HCAO has over 90 endorsing or member organizations including over 20 churches and church groups. Over 200 statewide business owners are members or endorsers. The group has worked since the turn of the century advocating for universal healthcare.

We pushed legislation creating a study by the Rand Corporation which analyzed the best means to achieve universal coverage. Their report noted single payer would be the most efficient of the models studied and would cost us less than our current healthcare system. Further legislation created a study group, which then led to the Task Force on Universal Healthcare which, after 3 years of work and outreach to stakeholder groups statewide, has submitted their more than 200 page report to the legislature and, in the person of Bruce Goldberg, former director of Oregon Health Authority, presented to you at a recent Senate Health Care Committee meeting. He, and we, are recommending you vote yes on SB 704 to create a Governing Board to design the Universal Health Plan, negotiate waivers from the federal government to allow the use of Medicare and Medicaid dollars to finance a large part of the plan, and finalize a revenue formula to pay for the rest. Fortunately, Oregon has a track record of over 30 years of successfully negotiating federal waivers that helped structure the nationally respected Oregon Health Plan and other elements of our health care system in Oregon.

Wearing another hat, I am also the Marion County Democrat's Neighborhood Leader Program Coordinator and would like to let our district-wide voters know you have supported this important bill both as members of the Senate Health Care Committee and as Oregonians who believe all of our residents should receive the affordable healthcare they need.

Thanks in advance for your serious consideration of this bill and, and, I hope, a yes vote to move it forward. As we say in Health Care for All Oregon, let's create a healthcare system in Oregon where everybody is in, and nobody is out!

Lee Mercer, Silverton