

TO: Oregon House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
FROM: Suezeev Ranseen
RE: Support for HB 2002

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chair Goodwin and Nelson, and Committee Members,

I am asking you to vote yes on HB 2002, because gender-affirming health care is life-saving care. This bill will close gaps in insurance coverage of critical care for transgender Oregonians.

I did not start my transition as a trans nonbinary person until my early thirties because I did not have access to a safe place to transition or healthcare that would support my gender transition. One of the reasons I moved back to Oregon after years of living across the United States is because I knew it was a safe place to be a transgender person. The likelihood that I could have support to transition was higher in Oregon and the likelihood that I would be discriminated against was lower. I made Oregon my home because it was a safe state. It was a state where my gender markers and name on my legal forms could reflect who I was. I was overjoyed when I could walk into the DMV to get my marker as an X instead of something that was never me.

I was lucky enough to find government jobs, first with the state and then with a local municipality, that provided me with health insurance coverage that allowed for me transition to becoming the person I am. Without this coverage, the legal protections and opportunities, the access to medical care, and the legacy of Oregon being a safe state, my transition would not have been possible. This does not mean there hasn't been difficulties and barriers, but the support and care that I have received during my transition has allowed me to truly be who I have always been.

I cannot express enough how the medical care I was provided from the beginning of my transition to today has changed my life. When I realized I was trans and saw all the barriers before me where I used to live, it seemed like an impossible battle. Even with getting care in a safe state, I did not know how much of my care would be covered and how much I could afford if it wasn't. For me to be healthy I needed two surgeries for my transition. One of these could have been considered cosmetic and therefore could have been denied or not covered. The other had been denied for years in the places I had previously lived, but Oregon, with the insurance that I had, it was considered essential care. It was only because of the health care provider I had and having a government job providing that care that my surgeries were not only not denied, but were fully covered. I could take the burden of the possible surgery cost off my shoulders to pay for school loans and rent, and save for a house.

Oregon is already a leader on trans health care access, but gaps in insurance coverage still exist for care that is crucial for many trans people, including electrolysis (hair removal) and facial affirmation surgeries.

These procedures are seen as "cosmetic" under Oregon insurance policy, but I can assure you that for trans people, these are medically necessary procedures that improve life outcomes for this population.

The fact that I could get gender affirming care that was covered by insurance meant that I did not have to choose between necessary medical procedures, or risk bankruptcy or homelessness to be who I am. I do not have to live in pain anymore. I can focus on joy, on my career, and on my family. Nothing about my medical treatments were cosmetic or frivolous; they were necessary for my survival. Gender affirming care is necessary care; it is no different from any other necessary medical treatment.

Without gender affirming care, I would not be alive.

I wish to express that trans people are never going to stop being present no matter how much hate is directed at us. I am a human being, and as a human being I right to be treated equally under the law regardless of my sex and/or gender. Trans people should not have to choose between their very lives, their bodies, and their economic security. We should not be pushed away from care because we are trans. Please keep Oregon a safe state and further its legacy of being a leader in human rights by supporting HB 2002. Close the gap and remove the outdated idea that trans health care is cosmetic, unneeded, or somehow less important. This care is real and just as important as other health care.

You have an opportunity to advance legislation that will be truly life-changing—and perhaps even lifesaving—for transgender Oregonians like me. Please remember my story when you are voting on this bill, and please vote yes on HB 2002.

Thank you,

SueZeev Ranseen (They/Them)