

Submitter: Jenny Abeling
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and members the joint Ways and Means committee, I am here today on behalf of the Essential Worker Healthcare Trust (EWHT) trustees and members to urge your support for continued funding of the Essential Worker Healthcare Trust.

Long-term care impacts all Oregonians and is essential to a thriving healthcare system in our state. The workers who keep long-term care going in Oregon care deeply for the elderly, people with disabilities, and our most vulnerable populations who need assistance to care for themselves.

Long-term care employees have had far too little access to healthcare for far too long. The difficulty of the job and a lack of access to quality healthcare has turned people away from careers in long-term care, which has left Oregon's facilities chronically understaffed.

That's why, during the 2021 legislative session, responsible long term care employers, SEIU Local 503, and the legislature came together to pass SB800, creating the Essential Workforce Healthcare Fund. Once SB 800 was passed, we moved at a rapid pace to launch the Trust and our health plan, an affordable, high-quality plan for essential workers in Oregon.

This past fall we completed our first open enrollment period, where we consistently heard caregivers say that the benefits were "transformational" for themselves and their families. Benefits started on January 1. As one employee, who has access to Regence through the Trust, told us:

"My last insurance plan was terrible. I was billed hundreds of dollars for routine care and had many prescriptions denied by the carrier. I'm beyond thrilled to have Regence BlueCross BlueShield. This means I can address pertinent health concerns and have routine monitoring completed to ensure my health and well-being."

The improved health care benefit that our Trustees designed would not have been possible without the investments provided by SB 800 that on average lowered nursing home caregivers' monthly insurance premiums by 70% for individuals and 77% for families, making quality healthcare affordable for the lowest wage workers.

With over 1900 long-term employees and their dependents covered, the Trust is thriving and doing exactly what we set out to do. Moving forward, our plan is to more than double the amount of essential workers in the Trust in the coming years which is why we need continued funding from the State of Oregon.

Thank you for your continued support of Essential Workers.

Sincerely,
Jenny Abeling