

March 12th, 2025

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Health Care
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Senate Committee on Health Care Hearing on SB 539

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

My name is Peter Merritt, and I am writing to you today on behalf of Portland-based nonprofit organization Project Access NOW to encourage you to support SB 539, which protects Oregonians from surprise hospital facility fees. Project Access NOW's mission to create equitable access to whole person care is deeply rooted in the pursuit of affordable and transparent health care for all, and we believe this legislation represents the next step towards that goal. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this critical legislation for Oregonians.

Right now, Oregon families are forced to make hard choices between paying for medical care or other basic needs. Last year, Project Access NOW paid over \$1,000,000 in health insurance premium support for individuals unable to afford their monthly insurance premium payments, assisted over 2,000 individuals with free or low-cost prescriptions, and coordinated over 1,500 donated primary and specialty care appointments for uninsured individuals unable to afford the exorbitant costs of seeking healthcare without insurance. It's clear that Oregonians are struggling with affordability more than ever. In 2024, more than three in four Oregonians had a hard time affording healthcare services because of cost, leading them to delay or go without care completely.¹ Unsurprisingly, Black, Hispanic, low-income communities, and women are the hardest hit.² Additionally, nearly half of adults in Oregon say they would struggle to pay a \$1,500 medical bill.³

Facility fees are extra charges for receiving services at hospital-owned facilities - including doctor's offices and clinics off the hospital's main property. These fees regularly exceed the

¹ Altarum, Oregon Survey Respondents Struggle to Afford High Health Care Costs; Worry about Affording Health Care in the Future; Support Government Action Across Party Lines, 2024, p. 1

² Lopes, Lunna, et al. "Americans' Challenges with Health Care Costs," 2024

³ 2023 OSPIRG Survey, 2023, p. 3

cost of the care provided and often are not completely covered by insurance, turning simple, inexpensive procedures into major - and unexpected - financial setbacks for Oregon families.

Oregonians overwhelmingly support fairer and more transparent hospital billing. Nearly all voters – including 93% of Democrats and 90% of Republicans – believe hospitals should provide up-front cost estimates to consumers. Three in four voters support legislative action to reduce hospital prices.

To be clear, SB 539 is not an outright ban on facility fees, but reasonable, common-sense legislation that will improve transparency and affordability for Oregonians. It limits hospitals from charging facility fees for certain routine services and in outpatient clinics, requires advance notice if a facility will charge such a fee, and mandates state-wide reporting and data collection on these fees.

We urge the committee to do the right thing for Oregonians and support SB 539. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Merritt
Public Affairs Manager
Project Access NOW