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## MEMORANDUM

To: Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care

From: Marty Carty, Director of Governmental Affairs, Oregon Primary Care Association

Date: March 20, 2025

Re: Support SB 42 -2

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Thank you for the opportunity to share our comments in support of Senate Bill 42 and the -2 amendment, which would ensure that critical funding is available to sustain Oregon's Vaccine Access Program (VAP).

The Vaccine Access Program (VAP) is a vital resource that ensures that immunizations are available to Oregonians when and where they need them most. Currently, there are 300 participating VAP providers across the state - inclusive of Federally Qualified Health Centers (health centers), who are responsible for serving Oregon's most medically disadvantaged and historically underserved populations. Health centers are a key component of our safety net system of care, providing comprehensive primary care and prevention services to everyone, regardless of ability to pay. Services provided in health centers, including vaccinations, are crucial to patients - as many would not have access to these services in other settings.

Because of the uncertainty with regard to both the source and level of funding for services provided at health centers, the payment mechanism for obtaining vaccines through the VAP is critical for ensuring health centers are able to maintain an adequate stock of necessary immunizations. As entities that have a statutory obligation to serve low-income individuals, many of whom are uninsured or underinsured, health centers operate with little to no margin - and being able to obtain vaccines at no initial cost and pay for them once the immunizations are delivered (and reimbursed) ensures that immunizations are readily available and delivered to patients when they present for care. The investment in the Vaccine Access Program outlined in SB 42 -2 is crucial to supporting our safety net system, and without it, health centers may not be positioned to devote the upfront resources necessary to stock vaccines for many of their patients.

Without the funding proposed in SB 42-2, Oregon faces a potential 65-70% reduction in VAP participating clinics. Rural communities, which already experience health care access challenges, would be disproportionately impacted. This reduction in VAP participation would not only create sub-standard care for many of our most vulnerable patients in the state, it would put our entire system of public health at risk.

The funding included in SB 42 -2 is not only necessary to sustain the Vaccine Access Program for the 300 providers currently participating, these resources will help expand the program - as there are currently 50 providers on a waitlist to participate. There has never been a more critical time to ensure that as many providers as possible are equipped with the vaccines they need to protect Oregonians, as we are seeing increases in vaccine preventable diseases in the state.

In 2024, Oregon saw its highest number of measles cases in 30 years and over 1,000 pertussis cases - the largest outbreak in 50 years. Pediatric immunization rates in the state are at their lowest since 2018. We must take action to ensure that we are doing everything possible to make vaccines readily available. If we fail to devote the resources needed to maintain the VAP, we run the risk of vaccine preventable disease outbreaks like those being seen in other parts of the country - contributing to unnecessary illness, and even death.

SB 42-2's \$5 million allocation for vaccine purchases and \$1.8 million for program administration represent a wise investment in Oregon's public health infrastructure. Because the program replenishes immunization funds through quarterly billing, this one-time investment in the purchase of vaccines will have lasting benefits for our communities. Additionally, the Oregon Health Authority has committed to continuing the work the Vaccine Finance Reform Steering Committee began last year to explore more sustainable models for vaccine financing that the state could implement in the future.

Prevention requires a proactive approach, and the Vaccine Access Program provides this mechanism within the state to ensure that immunizations are distributed to the places where Oregonians need them most. Failing to provide the resources needed to maintain this program puts the health and safety of Oregonians at risk. On behalf of health centers across the state, OPCA strongly urges you to support SB 42 and the -2 amendment to protect access to these vital immunization services.

Sincerely,

**Marty Carty**

Governmental Affairs Director

**The Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA) is the nonprofit membership organization for the state's 34 federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). OPCA member clinics deliver comprehensive, culturally responsive integrated medical, dental, and behavioral health services for traditionally underserved communities. As a unifying voice of Oregon's FQHCs, OPCA drives transformative policy development to advance health equity across the state and beyond.**

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