

September 5, 2017

Lee Mercer Testimony

Chair Devlin, Chair Rayfield, members of the committee:

For the record my name is Lee Mercer, Mobilization Chair and former President of Health Care for All Oregon.

HCAO is working towards universal publicly funded healthcare in Oregon. We currently have nearly 23,000 in our database, 120-member organizations and over 160 supporting businesses. As we meet with Oregonians in our canvassing, tabling, speaking and film events, we hear hundreds of stories of individuals suffering from lack of health care or the health care costs they are experiencing.

Until we reach universal health care, hundreds of our members have been active defending health care coverage by speaking out at townhalls throughout the state against repeal of the ACA which would throw 22 million Americans off of health care.

Similarly, a no vote on Referendum 301 will throw potentially hundreds of thousands of Oregonians off the Oregon Health Plan. It is important that the danger of loss of health care to thousands of Oregonians is reflected in the language of LC 25.

I also am on the Executive Committee of Main Street Alliance of Oregon, currently with about 3000 small statewide business owners on our statewide list. Many of these small business owners depend on OHP for their health coverage.

In Silverton, where I live, there was a story in most recent Our Town newspaper, about area resident Randy Traeger, known for his family's signature product line, the Traeger barbecue. Randy has recently undergone not one but two liver transplants which, due to ongoing medical costs, have forced him to depend on OHP and disability. This is an example how anyone may need OHP to get through hard times.

The current draft ballot title fails to convey the human impacts of Referendum 301. Voters are not told that hundreds of thousands of Oregonians face losing their Oregon Health Plan coverage, and thousands more could see their premiums rise.

The ballot title should state explicitly how many Oregonians stand to lose coverage or would see their premiums rise if voters repeal the Healthcare Protections Bill. Without the actual number, voters could likely be misled about what the actual impact of Referendum 301 will be. The numbers are staggering, but it's important to remember that the numbers represent real, human lives.

Thanks for your time and consideration in this matter.