

— AUSTIN N. PUTNAM —

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Chair Greenlick and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Joint Resolution 203 to enshrine health care as a human right in the Oregon State Constitution. My name is Austin Putnam and I am able to access health care through publically funded health insurance.

On January 9th, 2009 my friend, Lauren and I were walking down a sidewalk, when two drunk drivers crashed into one another. The collision sent a speeding Volvo directly into my friend and I. My right leg was amputated instantly and a fifth of my left thigh was de-gloved. I also suffered cranial damage.

After my stay at the hospital, I was in bad shape financially. I applied for disability and was denied for two years. It wasn't until I obtained a lawyer that my case was approved.

I depend on Medicare. My prosthetic leg cost thousands of dollars and needs replacing every three years. Without Medicare my situation would be dire.

Although my health care access may be relatively safe, too many people don't have that reassurance. In the face of significant turmoil when it comes to health care at the federal level, far too many people on the cusp of OHP eligibility are left wondering if they will still have health care this time next year. Too many people who buy private insurance through the marketplace are worried that their access will evaporate. And for too many -- myself included -- access to insurance does not necessarily equate to affordable health care that Oregonians can actually utilize.

But, as a state, we now have the opportunity to take the first step in ensuring that 100% of Oregonians can meaningfully access care. Across the state, Oregonians have spoken loud and clear: we believe that health care is a fundamental right. It's time that our state constitution reflected that shared value.

The HOPE initiative makes Oregon's commitment to equitable health care crystal clear and offers an important platform for some of the best minds in health care – including providers, insurers, hospitals, patients and consumer advocates – to come together to make sure Oregon is living up to our full potential: to give every Oregonian the opportunity to live a healthy and productive life.

Oregon has been a pioneer in expanding innovative and effective care and this is the next step. For Oregonians like me, HOPE is reassurance that our ability to get the services and medication we need can't simply be cut off tomorrow, next week, or next year. It sends a message that our state truly cares about every single Oregonian.

It's time to put a stop to the uncertainty around health care in Oregon. I urge your support of the HOPE Initiative.

Thank you,

