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For more information, Contact:
Hannah Kurowski:
Hannah.Kurowski@oregonlegislature.gov

House Passes Bill to Ensure Equitable and Affordable Access to Healthcare

House Bill 2362 B, the Equal Access to Care Act, would create a community oversight process for proposed healthcare transactions to rein in rising healthcare costs and preserve access to essential healthcare services

SALEM, OR -- Today the House voted to pass the Equal Access to Care Act, or [House Bill 2362 B](#), which would create a robust community oversight process for proposed healthcare transactions, including mergers, acquisitions, and affiliations. The landmark legislation will help rein in rising healthcare prices and preserve access to essential healthcare services.

Oregonians have been struggling with rising healthcare prices, with a 29 percent increase in just four years according to the Oregon Health Authority. Decades of academic research has shown that consolidation in healthcare leads to higher prices without improving the quality of patient care. These profit-driven decisions disproportionately impact those who can least afford to pay for care. If passed, everyone who pays for healthcare will benefit from this bill, including individuals and families, employers, and insurance carriers.

“Patients and the communities most affected deserve to have a say when hospitals make decisions that will increase the prices they pay or limit access to services they depend on . Many times the public isn’t even aware a transaction is planned until the deal is final--or when the hospital collection agent starts calling. With HB 2362 we’re making sure patients aren’t left in the dark,” said [Rep. Andrea Salinas](#) (D-Lake Oswego), chief sponsor of the bill.

HB 2362 would require OHA to convene a review board to hold a public hearing and provide a recommendation in the case of comprehensive reviews. Their decision rubric must consider impacts on cost growth, impacts to essential services, and how the transaction addresses historical and current health inequities. The review board would include members of the affected community, consumer advocates, and health care experts.

Since COVID-19, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families and communities, and especially BIPOC women, have been disproportionately impacted in terms of health disparities, job losses and reductions in income. Rising costs in healthcare premiums, deductibles and copays continue to exacerbate inequities and BIPOC communities' economic stability.

"COVID has made it extremely clear--if it wasn't already--that healthcare is more than just a business, it's personal. Access to quality, affordable services is a matter of life and death," said [Rep. Wlinsvey Campos](#) (D-Aloha). "When a hospital or healthcare organization is putting profits over patients, it's time to make changes. HB 2362 is putting the power back in community hands."

Healthcare consolidations in the U.S. and Oregon have increased significantly in recent years. [Between 2016-2018](#) there were 50 mergers or acquisitions by health systems, and by 2018 nearly 91 percent of hospital beds in the U.S. were affiliated with a health system.

In Oregon, independent hospitals have [declined 43 percent since 2000](#), and hospitals and health systems are expanding outpatient offerings rapidly by acquiring existing practices and opening new clinics across the state. According to the Oregon Health Authority, in less than four years, healthcare costs in Oregon have increased by 29 percent.

"When I became a state representative, I vowed to always bring a patient-first, healthcare provider lens when evaluating policy. I support HB 2362 because it puts patient care first," said [Rep. Rachel Prusak](#) (D-West Linn). "The most powerful element of this bill is the transparency it will provide for our healthcare system. This legislation fills a critical gap in oversight and will provide much-needed transparency, public accountability, and community input. It is a change to center the process on patients and equity—not profit."

HB 2362 B requires that mergers, acquisitions, and some other types of transactions involving healthcare entities receive approval from the Department of Consumer and Business Services or Oregon Health Authority. The bill exempts transactions based on financial thresholds. Certain types of affiliations and contracts will not require review.

Multiple community organizations and leaders submitted testimony and participated in the process leading up to the passage of this bill, including SEIU, Planned Parenthood, ACLU Oregon, NARAL, the Oregon Nurse Association, Basic Rights Oregon, among others.

"House passage of HB 2362 means Oregon is one step closer to much-needed healthcare transaction review," said **Felisa Hagins**, Political Director of SEIU Local 49. "If adopted into law, this landmark legislation will help patients, workers, and employers by controlling rising healthcare prices, maintaining access to essential healthcare services, and improving health equity."

The bill passed 32-23 and now heads to the Senate for consideration.

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