



PRESS RELEASE

OREGON HOUSE DEMOCRATS

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House Votes to Expedite Voter Review of Critical Health Care Protections, Transportation Funding

SB 229 sets Jan. 2018 election date for potential health care referendum, giving voters a faster response time

The Oregon House today passed [Senate Bill 229](#) to give voters an earlier opportunity to weigh in on two important pieces of legislation—Medicaid funding and transportation—that have been approved by lawmakers this session. If political campaigns succeed in gathering signatures to force the Medicaid funding bill to the ballot, voters will be able to have their voices heard at the earliest possible date: January 23, 2018. A referendum on the transportation package would be held at the May 2018 Primary.

“Voters have a constitutional right to have their voices heard, if enough signatures are gathered to bring a referendum forward,” says **Rep. Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis)**. “SB 229 follows the process outlined in the Oregon Constitution for setting referendum election dates. This allows voters to resolve this question as quickly as possible, so that we can move forward based on their answer. It’s a prudent approach that ensures that Oregonians don’t lose their health care in the meantime.”

Background: In June, the Oregon Legislature passed a robust bipartisan plan to protect health care coverage for the more than 1 million people who receive care through the Oregon Health Plan, Oregon’s version of Medicaid. The funding program was the result of months of work with hospitals, health care providers, insurance providers, and agencies to ensure that Oregonians don’t lose their health care.

Even while Congressional Republicans attempt to slash health care for more than 20 million Americans, Oregon’s approach raises more than \$600 million to preserve health care for hundreds of thousands and keep insurance premiums down.

However, earlier this week, three Republican members of the Oregon House filed a referendum on most of this bill. If they are successful in gathering enough signatures to qualify, the entire bill goes on hold until an election is held. The default date for that election is November 2018, jeopardizing the entire budget for the Oregon Health Plan for more than a year. That’s far too long for Oregon families to wait in limbo.

The Oregon Constitution explicitly gives the legislature the authority to set an alternate date for referenda elections; SB 229 sets that date for next January for the potential Medicaid funding referendum. This preserves Oregonians rights to have their voice heard, and also gives the Legislature time to prudently respond in the February 2018 session to protect Oregonians' health care.

SB 229 also establishes a ballot title process that emphasizes public input and bipartisanship through a joint legislative committee. The committee's meetings will be subject to public meetings and public records laws, increasing transparency. Members of the public can still file a legal challenge of the ballot titles to the Oregon Supreme Court.

The bill passed 34-25 and will go to the Senate for a concurrence vote.

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