



OREGON HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE

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House Republicans unanimously oppose partisan abortion legislation

HB 3391 is an assault on religious liberty, expends taxpayer funds to support abortions

Salem, Ore. - House Republicans today stood in unanimous opposition to HB 3391, legislation which provides taxpayer funding for abortions and requires Oregon health insurance plans to offer coverage for abortions, including elective late-term pregnancy terminations. Republicans argued the bill would require Oregon employers with deeply held religious beliefs to violate their own moral convictions and force Oregon taxpayers to foot the bill for abortions.

"It's extremely disheartening that House Democrats have decided to move forward with this bill despite overwhelming concerns from employers and religious Oregonians," said Representative Jodi Hack (R-Salem). "Oregonians have a right to access reproductive care, but that does not mean Oregon employers should be forced to forfeit their right to hold true to their deeply held religious beliefs."

HB 3391 requires health plans sold in Oregon to include coverage for a wide range of reproductive health care services including, most controversially, pregnancy terminations. The bill's extremely narrow religious exemption language would apply almost exclusively to churches and religious nonprofits, meaning thousands of employers with deeply held religious beliefs could be forced to violate their consciences by having few other options but to purchase health insurance plans that include abortion. Only entities that meet the narrow definition of "religious employer" detailed in [ORS 743A.066](#) would be exempt from the abortion requirement.

"If an Oregon employer chooses not to provide abortion coverage, that does not mean an Oregon worker is going to be denied access to reproductive care," continued Rep. Hack. "Nothing prevents an Oregonian from seeking additional coverage if they feel the coverage options provided by their employer are inadequate."

The nonpartisan Legislative Revenue Office estimates that HB 3391 will cost Oregon taxpayers more than \$10,000,000 to implement, with a significant portion of that money used specifically to fund abortion procedures. An analyst with the Oregon Health Authority testified before the Joint Ways and Means Committee that roughly \$500,000 taxpayer dollars would be used pay for abortions.

"At a time when we are being forced to make so many difficult choices in many areas of our budget, I am disappointed that this Legislature has decided to put this bill and its \$10 million price tag ahead of so many other critical priorities," said Representative Duane Stark (R-Grants Pass). "I do not believe this bill represents an appropriate use of taxpayer dollars."

Republicans also noted that HB 3391 may be in violation of The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which prohibits any government from substantially burdening a person's exercise of religion except in limited circumstances. The United States Supreme Court cited RFRA when it ruled in *Burwell v.*

Hobby Lobby that Hobby Lobby could not be compelled to purchase health plans that included certain kinds of contraceptive care that violated the corporation's religious beliefs.

The bill may also ultimately be found in violation of a federal law known as the Weldon amendment. The law, which has been in place since 2004, prohibits state governments from requiring health insurance providers to cover abortions. If HB 3391 is signed into law and Oregon is found in violation of the Weldon amendment, the state could stand to lose millions of dollars of financial support from the federal government.

"There are several very serious legal issues with this bill," said House Republican Leader Mike McLane (R-Powell Butte). "Thousands of Oregonians rely on our state government for Medicaid and other healthcare services that are funded primarily by the federal government. If HB 3391 is found to be in violation of federal law, all of those resources could suddenly be at risk."

HB 3391 passed the House on a 33-23 vote, with one Democrat joining Republicans in voting no. The bill now moves to the Senate for further consideration.

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