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Legislation would set stage for universal health care

Bill establishes board that would set up Health Care for All Oregon Plan

SALEM – Nearly 40 members of the Oregon Legislature are leading the charge on a bill that would set the stage for universal health care in Oregon.

Late this morning, a group of State Senators filed Senate Bill 770 – the Health Care for All Oregon Bill – which would create a board and set up other components necessary to establish the Health Care for Oregon Plan to provide universal coverage throughout the state. So far, 37 legislators have signed on as sponsors.

“Health care is a basic human necessity and it should be a right,” Sen. James Manning, D-Eugene, a chief co-sponsor of the bill, said. “We all need health care, and you can’t survive without it. We’ve got to make sure that we get universal health care set up in Oregon so that none of us go bankrupt or die just because we get sick and don’t have health insurance.”

The bill sets eligibility requirements for a Health Care for Oregon Plan. Those include being an Oregon resident, but those living outside the state who are employed full-time in Oregon also can use the program, if they pay into it. Immediate family members and dependents of qualifying individuals also will qualify, as the bill is written.

“Our state has been, and will continue to be, a national leader in the fight to ensure that that everyone has access to quality health care they actually can afford to use,” Rep. Julie Fahey, D-Eugene, another chief co-sponsor of the bill, said. “I am proud to co-sponsor this legislation that continues to move us towards this goal.”

It also creates a Health Care for All Board comprising members from a variety of backgrounds, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate. Those board members will plan and supervise the development, implementation and management of the plan. The board would establish a transitional plan toward the universal system, as well as create a regional approach to allocating resources. Funding would come from a dedicated fund – distinct from the state’s General Fund – that would be established within the State Treasury.

“In Oregon, we take care of each other, and health care is one of the most basic needs,” Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, said. “To reach the point to where our communities around the state are truly thriving, we all must have access to affordable health care.”

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