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Senate helps small business provide health care to workers *SB 1003 modifies requirements for association health care plans*

SALEM – Legislation that gives small businesses and their employees increased access to affordable health insurance passed off the Senate floor this morning. Senate Bill 1003 is a key piece of the Senate Democrats' February [agenda](#) of supporting small business and helping Oregon families get back on track.

“Health care costs are simply too high for many small businesses,” said Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham), chief sponsor of the bill and chair of the Senate Health Care Committee. “This bill will give more middle class Oregonians access to health care provided by their employers.”

Senate Bill 1003 modifies provisions in association health plans, which are used by many general contractors and other small businesses to offer health care to their workers.

“Losing association health plans would lead to cost prohibitive health insurance for many small businesses, which could ultimately lead to more uninsured Oregonian,” said Shawn Miller, spokesperson for the Associated Builders and Contracting and the Independent Electrical Contractors, two organizations that use association health plans.

Under current law, 95 percent of all members of an association must participate in order for the association to qualify for the plan. In the current recession, this threshold has been impossible to meet for many small businesses. SB 1003 creates exemptions in these all-or-nothing plans, giving more Oregonians access to health care.

“This bill removes barriers to small businesses' ability to provide access to health insurance to their workers,” said Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin). “This simple change should allow more people access to quality, affordable health care.”

Senate Bill 1003 now moves to the House.

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