

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
American Jewish Committee, Oregon Chapter
Jewish Federation of Greater Portland
Oregon Center for Christian Values
Urban League of Portland

Press Release

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Contact: Kevin Finney: cell (503) 250-0937,
office (503) 221-1054, ext. 204

Religious leaders speak out for children's health care *Diverse faith traditions urge a yes vote on Oregon Measure 50*

A diverse group of Portland area religious leaders today spoke out about their belief that Measure 50 is a fair and effective response to the crying moral injustice of more than 100,000 Oregon children who lack health care insurance.

Gathered at St. Philip the Deacon Episcopal Church, a historically African-American congregation in northeast Portland, the faith leaders also responded to opposition arguments that Measure 50 is unfair to smokers.

The event was hosted by five religious and community non-profit organizations: Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO), the American Jewish Committee Oregon Chapter, the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, the Oregon Center for Christian Values and the Urban League of Portland.

David Leslie, the executive director of EMO, noted, "The faith leaders who have gathered here or who have endorsed Measure 50 includes Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders throughout Oregon. We may disagree on many articles of belief, but our diverse traditions agree on the need to care for all our children and on the right of all persons to quality health care."

Leslie also read a statement of support from Robert T. Hoshibata, resident bishop of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Bishop Hoshibata has publicly endorsed Measure 50. This is his statement:

"Because I am traveling today, I cannot be present with other representatives of our faith communities who are gathering to urge you to vote for Measure 50. This measure promises to improve the quality of life for Oregonians by making it possible for children and the working poor to better access health care and medical insurance. This will enable families to utilize more of their income for food and other critical necessities of life. We cannot overestimate the many related benefits that will be realized by the passage of Measure 50."

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Lutheran Bishop David Brauer-Rieke expressed the support of the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Measure 50, stating, "Social statements from our Church clearly recognize the health care crisis that is upon us. We recognize our moral obligation to advocate on behalf of those who have little or no access to basic care and comfort. Measure 50 offers support and needed services for our children, in many cases those who most need such care and are the least able to provide it for themselves. The promised focus on rural health care and school based clinics is appropriate and functional. Oregon youth deserve what Measure 50 offers and more."

The Rev. Alcena Boozer, rector of St. Philip the Deacon Episcopal Church, responded to tobacco company arguments that an increase in the tobacco tax is unfair to smokers, "African-American and Latino communities have disproportionately high rates of smoking-caused death and disease. Tobacco companies often target young people in our communities in their efforts to recruit new smokers. By increasing the tobacco tax and using part of that money to fund anti-smoking education programs, we can reduce the number of our young people who take up smoking—and we fund the healthy kids program too. It's a double dose of good news for children's health."

Rabbi Michael Z. Cahana, senior rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel, described it as a "scandal" that more than 100,000 children in Oregon lack health insurance. "Children without access to health care don't do as well in school. They become sick more often and miss more school than their peers. They often defer needed medical treatment, so that they end up in emergency rooms, where they receive extremely expensive care. Ultimately, the lack of health insurance can even lead to unnecessary death or disability."

Rabbi Cahana continued, "Our religious teachings instruct us that we have a responsibility to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. Jewish tradition teaches us that if we can save one life, it is as if we have saved an entire world, because each person's potential is unlimited. I support Measure 50 because it will help ensure that no Oregon child loses his or her life for lack of access to quality health care."

The Rev. Lynne Smouse López of Ainsworth United Church of Christ noted the high costs smoking imposes on all of us, saying, "We all end up paying for the costs of tobacco use—through higher health insurance premiums and higher taxes. By raising Oregon's tobacco tax to the same level as it is in the state of Washington, we can recover some of those costs and fund health care for children who desperately need it now."

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Stephanie Tama-Sweet, executive director of the Oregon Center for Christian Values, spoke about the way she sees the life of Jesus related to the issue of health care for children, stating, “When I look at the life of Jesus, it is absolutely clear that he cared for children. Jesus saw the beloved nature of children and recognized that God's intention was that they live a full and healthy and safe life. In our society based on politics and business and big money, though, kids are essentially voiceless in securing their own health and safety. Voting Yes on Measure 50 is the most effective, most secure way that we can ensure that our children have the health care they deserve. Voting Yes on Measure 50 is one of the ways we can ensure our children experience the fullness of life that God intended. Please join us in voting Yes on Measure 50.”

The Rev. Mark Knutson, senior pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church, said that faith communities are doing far more for Measure 50 than just holding press conferences. “Many of the organizations represented here today have supported the healthy kids program when it was a legislative proposal, and now that it is on the ballot many people of faith are involved in the Yes on 50 campaign. I personally want to invite all people of faith to join us at Augustana Lutheran Church on Sunday, Oct. 28, for “People of Faith Get Out the Vote Day,” at 2 p.m.” Augustana Lutheran Church is located at 2710 NE 14th Ave., Portland, Ore.