



February 10, 2015

The Honorable Sara Gelser
Chair, Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee
State Capitol
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Senate Bill 474, Specialty dental clinic for children with special needs

Dear Senator Gelser and members of the committee:

Providence Health & Services and the Providence Child Center have been caring for Oregon's most vulnerable children for over 60 years. We are rooted in the commitment to promote the inherent dignity of all children by providing each child in our care the opportunity to achieve his or her potential and the highest quality of life in an atmosphere of acceptance and love. The Providence Child Center provides a wide range of services to children with special needs and their families, including the specialty pediatric dental services.

The Providence Specialty Pediatric Dental Clinic serves nearly 1,400 patients many of whom have a primary diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders. We also treat a significant number of children who are medically fragile – having complex conditions that involve multiple organ systems. The clinic also treats children with diagnoses of cerebral palsy, seizure disorders, Down Syndrome and various mental health diagnoses including severe anxiety disorders.

Serving this population requires taking extra time to establish trust, develop relationships, talk about the process and develop a level of security with each child. Our dentists are trained to work with special needs children and provide comprehensive oral health care through the use of behavioral guidance, pediatric dental sedation and hospital-based dentistry under general anesthesia.

Senate Bill 474 will allow Providence to continue to provide preventative preventive and restorative dental care for children with developmental, medical and behavioral disabilities by enabling non-profit, charitable corporations with an existing dental program serving children with special needs to own a dental clinic. With some limited exceptions, Oregon statute requires that dental clinics are owned by dentists. After learning that our clinic failed to meet the requirements of current statute, Providence has explored a wide range of options to bring the clinic into compliance, including:

- Identifying a dentist, or dentists, willing to take ownership of the clinic.
- Creating a teaching clinic in partnership with an academic institution that currently has an exception in statute.
- Partnering with a Federally Qualified Health Clinic (FQHC), which also has an exception in statute.

The primary barrier to any of these potential solutions is the operational losses of the clinic. In addition to providing capital support, the Providence Child Center Foundation provides substantial ongoing operational support to the clinic every year. Providing the specialized level of care needed to serve these children, the majority of whom are Medicaid recipients, creates an unsustainable business model without the support of a foundation. Neither the dentists, nor the FQHC, were able to develop a sustainable funding model that would allow for the acquisition of the clinic. The academic model created additional challenges as the constant rotation of staff required for a teaching clinic was not conducive to the needs of these children. A consistent provider is critically important since so many of the children we serve struggle with change.

While a legislative solution was our last resort, Providence is committed to continuing to serve these children. We're grateful that the Oregon Dental Association agreed to work with us to develop an additional exemption for non-profit corporations operating dental clinics serving children with special needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our commitment to the children of the Providence Child Center and the Pediatric Specialty Dental Clinic. We ask for your favorable consideration of Senate Bill 474.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Theron Park".

Theron Park
Chief Executive, Delivery System
Providence Health & Services - Oregon