



June 26, 2017

Senator Elizabeth Steiner-Hayward, Co-Chair
Representative Dan Rayfield, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of PeaceHealth to express my strong support for SB 944, and to urge its passage.

SB 944 would require the Oregon Health Authority to “contract with an Oregon-based nonprofit organization with the expertise to operate a 24-hour call center dedicated to tracking and providing information about available placement settings for children and adolescents needing high-acuity behavioral health services.”

I believe the creation of this call center would be a positive step toward resolving the troubling increase in the frequency and duration of emergency department (ED) visits by children and adolescents with behavioral health symptoms. Often, after stabilization, these vulnerable patients must wait far too long in the ED for placement in an appropriate setting.

Serious problems arise for these young patients while awaiting placement. They may co-mingle with adults in acute psychiatric crisis. When possible, ED staff attempt to prevent co-mingling and limit youth access to dangerous equipment by placing the young patients in a secure room. However, the secure room limits chances for the patients to go outside and engage in age-appropriate activities. Schooling, behavioral specialist visits, and other DHS services usually are not provided in the ED setting. Prolonged boarding also presents a risk of physical, mental and/or psychiatric deterioration.

The number of cases and average length of stay for youth boarding in the PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Center EDs have increased over the past six months, with individuals boarding for several weeks. This has caused the EDs to go on nearly 120 hours of psychiatric divert status, during which times other children and adults in a mental health crisis could not receive ED care.

I believe this bill would be a positive step toward ensuring the best possible service setting for patients in need of timely and urgent psychiatric care. For these and other reasons, I ask for your support for SB 944.

I also hope to continue the conversation in advance of the 2018 session, during which I hope to help the Legislature to identify and formalize a solution for contracting for safe placement for patients with developmental disabilities or behaviors that place them or others at risk for harm.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have, and I invite you to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Anne McMurren". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Mary Anne McMurren, BSN, MHA
Interim Chief Operating Officer
PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Center,
RiverBend and University District