



February 6, 2020

Oregon State Legislature
House Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: House Bill 4029 – Public Charge Rule Implications for Hospital Financial Assistance

Chair Salinas and members of the House Committee on Health Care:

On behalf of Oregon's community hospitals and the patients they serve, the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (OAHHS) supports HB 4029. Oregon's hospitals and health systems work every day to provide care for those who need it and ensure patients have access to programs that provide critical services. The Jan. 27 decision by the Supreme Court to allow the Department of Homeland Security to implement a new public charge rule threatens this mission by discouraging legal immigrants who are seeking a pathway to citizenship from enrolling in medical assistance, nutrition aid or housing supports that address the social determinants of health.

Medicaid provides comprehensive and coordinated care that goes beyond hospital services and includes dental health, behavioral health, and prescription drug coverage. Expanding Medicaid and standing up coordinated care organizations has been a cornerstone in Oregon's health system transformation efforts to ensure people have access to care. Hospital financial assistance is not intended to replace government or commercial coverage, as such, Oregon's hospitals are key entities for getting people enrolled in Medicaid as a part of patient financial assistance services. We want to ensure that nothing in HB 4029 will preclude a hospital from educating patients about the benefits of Medicaid and assisting people in applying should they choose to do.

While enrolling people in insurance coverage is and should be our collective number one goal, given the public charge rule, hospitals recognize and understand the risk for individuals and families seeking permanent residence status, as it could jeopardize their citizenship. With that, OAHHS supports HB 4029's intent to ensure patients and families are provided services and enrolled in those services for which they are eligible.

Given that Medicaid enrollment is an important component of hospital financial assistance, this bill will require some modification of hospital financial assistance policies in addition to other workflow adjustments to ensure clear communications with patients and their families about their options. Hospital financial assistance policies are currently being updated to prepare for the next phase of requirements from HB 3076 (2019), which go into effect Jan. 1, 2021. To support alignment, OAHHS requests that the emergency clause be removed from HB 4029.

In addition, we ask the Oregon Health Authority, along with our collective partners in this effort, to monitor for any unintended consequences of this federal change which required HB 4029– such as an increase in the number of people who are not impacted by public charge, choosing not to enroll in Medicaid and relying on hospital financial assistance as the primary source of coverage. If HB 4029 does lead to unintended consequences in the broader uninsured rate, or if the public charge rule is revoked, OAHHS will work with stakeholders to bring forward policy solutions.

The public charge rule creates a real obstacle for a significant number of families. Oregon’s hospitals treat everyone regardless of ability to pay, citizenship or insurance status and will continue to connect people to health care coverage. OAHHS supports HB 4209 as a means to clarify this mission.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Kolmer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sean Kolmer
Senior Vice President of Policy and Strategy
Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems