

March 1, 2021

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
900 Court St. NE – Remote B
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: HB 5024 – OSH civil commitment patients

Co-chairs Lieber and Nosse and members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services,

I am writing to ask for your help addressing the needs of civil commitment patients in Oregon. By the requirements of Oregon law, civil commitment patients should be cared for by the Oregon State Hospital. Unfortunately, OSH is not admitting these patients. The result is civil commitment patients holding for months in community hospitals while waiting admittance to a more appropriate location for long-term intensive psychiatric care, such as OSH or a residential treatment facility. This is bad for patients and bad for community hospitals.

Salem Health recently had a patient who stayed in our small in-patient psychiatric unit for more than 230 days because there was no access to OSH. Some of these patients waiting admittance to long-term intensive psychiatric care are violent, and they routinely assault our staff. This is not fair to our staff, or to the patients who need a different kind of care.

Community hospitals like ours are designed to stabilize patients experiencing an acute mental health crisis. Our processes, systems and resources are not designed to support long lengths of stay. The mental health care model in Oregon depends on adequate inventory in other levels of care once a patient has been stabilized at the hospital. Failure to properly place Oregonians with the right level of care results in poor outcomes, high costs and increased risk to staff and other patients.

I ask you prioritize civil commitment placement at OSH, using the opportunity of this budget to make whatever changes necessary. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Nester Wolfe
President and CEO
Salem Health