

February 2, 2022

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

Re: Senate Bill 1554 - Public health system response to COVID-19 pandemic study

Chair Patterson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care:

On behalf of Oregon's 62 community hospitals, their employees, and the patients they serve, the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (OAHHS) supports the study of the public health system response to COVID-19 pandemic in Senate Bill 1554, but we would like to see further clarity in the bill to ensure that it produces the desired information and actionable recommendations.

The depth and breadth of the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic affected our lives, the economy, and the health care system over the last two years was inconceivable prior to the pandemic. Our challenge in forecasting such a world altering event should not restrict our ability to learn from it after. However, much like our inability to conceive of all of the ways in which a pandemic may affect us, we cannot understand and discover lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic unless we examine specific questions within clear sideboards. SB 1554 would be enhanced and would result in better defined and actionable information, if the bill further clarifies what it will study, as well as what it will not.

The interconnected nature of the pandemic results in questions leading to other questions. Some of this can be seen in Section 1(4) and (5) of SB 1554. While included in the bill's study, these two sections could themselves be standalone studies. Additionally, given the responsibility that hospitals have played during the pandemic, including their public health related roles - from vaccinations to testing to data collection to patient care - we believe it is necessary that the bill be explicit in terms of how it will study the intersection between public health and hospitals.

Lastly, based on the significant roles that public health and the Oregon Health Authority played in the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to what this bill intends to study, we believe it would be more appropriate for a separate state agency, such as the Department of Administrative Services or the Office of Emergency Management, to be the body responsible for this study.

Our health care system has spent almost two years dealing with a crisis unprecedented in recent history and unimaginable in its breadth and scope. In view of these extraordinary circumstances, we support efforts to clearly and candidly examine the public health system's response to the pandemic.

Thank you,



Andi Easton
Vice President of Government Affairs

Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems