



March 13, 2023

House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

The Honorable Rep. Rob Nosse, Chair

The Honorable Rep. Christine Goodwin, Vice Chair

The Honorable Rep. Travis Nelson, Vice Chair

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chair Goodwin, Vice Chair Nelson and members of the committee, I write to offer support for House Bill 2544 on behalf of Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU).

Oregon, along with much of the nation, faces significant challenges in providing behavioral health to all who need it. [Last month, a study published by the Journal Health Affairs](#) authored by OHSU researchers John McConnell, M.D., Kelsey Watson, M.P.H., Esther Choo, M.D., M.P.H., and Jane Zhu, M.D., highlighted the nationwide reliance on emergency departments for behavioral health care. The researchers noted, that while emergency departments offer an important resource to individuals in need, they do not provide the kind of long-term care people need.

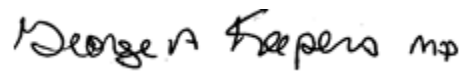
At OHSU, we see far too many individuals suffering from substance abuse disorders and/or in need of behavioral health care enter our emergency department in crisis and, with no other options available to them, stay in our hospital longer than needed. This creates capacity challenges in our already stressed system and prevents individuals from getting the treatment and care they need in appropriate settings.

In order to continue making progress on this issue it is vital the state continue investing in behavioral health residential treatment. Very simply, we do not have the capacity to address the need. Community-based placements, whether in a secure residential treatment facility or supportive housing, ensures individuals

are receiving the services they need in a setting best suited to support successful treatment. Working to build out this infrastructure in locations throughout our state will help us meet the demand now and into the future. Without these important investments we will continue to fall behind.

Thank you, Chair Nosse for bringing this legislation forward. I also want to thank the legislature for their past support of investments to better our behavioral health system, and their ongoing commitment to this work. OHSU urges your support for House Bill 2544.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George A. Keepers M.D." with a small horizontal line under the "D" at the end.

George A. Keepers, M.D., DLFAPA, FAC Psych
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