

March 29, 2023

The Honorable Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Paul Evans, Co-Chair  
Ways & Means Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety

RE: support for Oregon Military Department Budget (HB 5031) and SB 1032

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Karl Wright. I am the Director of Supply Chain Management for Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics, a retired Colonel of the Utah Army National Guard of 33 years, deployed as a battalion commander to Operation Iraqi Freedom 2007-8, a first responder to Hurricane Rita/Katrina 2005, and current Chapter President of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) here in Salem, Oregon. I'm pleased to support House Bill 5031 and Senate Bill 1032.

Salem Health serves the mid-Willamette Valley with acute, primary, specialty, and urgent care. We serve patients in Marion and Polk counties, as well as those from Benton, Lincoln, and Yamhill counties.

In my role at Salem Health, I've had direct experience partnering with members of the National Guard deployed during pandemic surges. The influx of seriously ill patients that we and other hospitals experienced required an all-hands-on-deck approach, and we are grateful for the close partnership that formed between Salem Health and the Oregon National Guard through the trials of the pandemic

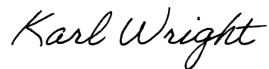
Salem Health's two hospitals, including Salem Hospital and West Valley, our critical access hospital in Dallas, both benefited from the deployment of National Guard troops. They supported operations related to patient care throughout our hospitals. Their presence gave our permanent staff a moment to breathe in the midst of the intense workloads and grief that were characteristic of pandemic surges. I can't overstate how thankful we were to have troops partner with us in this manner or how much respect they earned from our staff while on site at our hospitals.

When vaccines were released in late 2020, Salem Health quickly established Oregon's first mass vaccination clinic at the State Fairgrounds. The National Guard were again integral partners as we ramped up capacity to deliver tens of thousands of vaccine doses. The guard is critical backstop for our state, willing and capable to deploy in moments of crisis wherever they may be needed.

I served in the National Guard and, currently, as Oregon's representative to MOAA. During my tour of duty, I spent a good deal of time helping others navigate the complexities of tuition assistance. I was able to see, up close and personal, the positive impacts that the Oregon National Guard Student Tuition Assistance (ONGSTA) program has on the lives of Guard members. SB 1032 would establish a similar grant program for spouses and dependents of eligible Guard members through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Salem Health is supportive of this expansion, recognizing that the families of Guard members sacrifice when they are deployed. Supporting this program expansion is just one way to recognize these sacrifices and support our National Guard families.

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5031 and SB 1032.

Sincerely,



Karl Wright  
Director of Supply Chain Management

cc: Russell Gibson, Oregon Military Department