



## Linn County Health Services

*"Working Together to promote the health and well-being of all Linn County residents"*

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Feb 14, 2025

Oregon Senate Committee on Health Care

Oregon State Capital

900 Court St NE

Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 837

Dear Senate President Wagner, Pro Temp Manning, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to bring to your attention the importance of Senate Bill 837 in enhancing our local disaster response capabilities in Linn County. As you know, our county is home to over 131,000 residents spread across 2,309 square miles. When disaster strikes, our Medical Reserve Corps plays a crucial role in providing food, shelter, and medical assistance to affected individuals.

We frequently rely on SERV OR volunteers from across the State of Oregon to support our efforts during such critical times. However, the current response times can be problematic, often extending to days rather than hours. If Senate Bill 837 is passed, it would ensure that additional help can be mobilized swiftly, allowing us to receive volunteers & respond more effectively in times of crisis.

Having non-licensed medical volunteers plays a crucial role in our emergency response efforts. These dedicated individuals assist with essential tasks such as paperwork, setup and teardown, and logistics, which are vital for the smooth operation of our medical services during a crisis.

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### Administration

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As we strive to enhance our preparedness, it is imperative that we recruit non-licensed volunteers and have a mechanism in place for them to be deployed throughout the United States. Having a mutual aid system for OHA volunteers is important for positive outcomes.

- **Membership expansion:** The bill would expand the OHA volunteer pool from just licensed healthcare providers to include the essential non-licensed administrative and support personnel that are essential to healthcare. This would allow comprehensive deployments that support the licensed provider volunteers.
- **Year-round availability:** The bill would remove the requirement of a Governor's declaration of emergency or public health emergency, and allow SERV-OR volunteers to support local and tribal public health needs year-round, for small outbreaks, support in local evacuation shelters, and health fairs.
  1. In terms of risk to the state, the last 17 years of the program, with over 2,800 missions during the COVID pandemic, have led to zero tort claims and a very small number of injury claims, such as needle sticks and sprained ankles.
  2. This would lift the administrative burden and operational delays associated with an emergency declaration.
- **Out-of-state deployment:** The current statutes specify that Oregon can send SERV-OR volunteers to other states when they request support through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). But in 2018 we discovered we could not deploy to support Alaska after an earthquake because the statutes did not indicate that SERV-OR volunteers would be considered "officers of the state" as required by the EMAC statutes. This bill clarifies they are officers of the state for the purposes of EMAC. It also clarifies that we can provide tort and workers compensation coverage on those missions.
- **Health screenings:** The bill adds specific language to clarify that OHA can and should conduct health screenings so volunteers are assigned to the right missions, to meet their needs around mobility, fitness, or medical conditions.

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By doing so, we can ensure that our residents receive timely assistance and do not experience unnecessary delays in receiving help when they need it most.

I urge you to support this bill, as it will significantly improve our ability to provide timely aid to our community and enhance overall public safety. Thank you for your attention to this vital matter, and I look forward to your support.

Sincerely,



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