



Date: March 20, 2025

To: Chair Hartman, Vice-Chairs Nguyen and Scharf, and members of the House Committee on Early Childhood & Human Services

From: Legacy Health, Oregon Health & Science University, PeaceHealth, Providence Health & Services, and St. Charles Health System

Subject: Support for House Bill 3835 as amended

Hospitals across Oregon often serve as the first line of defense for children and families experiencing a mental health crisis. Our emergency departments provide critical services to help stabilize children and coordinate care to meet their mental, physical and emotional needs. This is work we take immense pride in, but the truth is it takes a community of clinical providers, health care facilities and family support to ensure the long-term wellbeing of Oregon's most vulnerable children.

Oregon hospitals are struggling with increasing volumes of children, youth and families seeking care for significant mental health issues - and a lack of capacity to serve them. House Bill 3835, the Access to Care and Treatment for youth (ACT), will improve Oregon's continuum of services and ensure children are able to access appropriate care.

Reduce instances of children in mental health crisis boarding in hospital emergency rooms

When youth arrive in crisis they are often agitated, engaged in self-harming behaviors and combative. This is exacerbated by the emergency department itself, which is an overstimulating and activating setting that isn't a "trauma-informed" environment. This makes it highly unlikely for any setting other than acute psychiatric care to accept them for treatment - even if acute care is not warranted. Rather than defaulting to the most restrictive level of acute care, this legislation increases access to care at group homes, day treatment programs, residential facilities and transportation companies.

Increase secure transport options for children in need of mental health services

Once a youth has been accepted for acute psychiatric care, it can take days for transportation to be available due to the increased regulatory requirements for secure transport. This legislation will resolve the severe challenges we have in safely transporting youth between different levels of care.

Remove barriers to community-based care settings for children not needing acute care services

Youth who are accepted into acute hospital care often languish due to a lack of step-down resources within local communities. Many facilities now require extended periods of "non-threatening behavior" and a lack of episodes of seclusion and/or restraint to accept someone for treatment due to fears of being unable to safely manage someone in behavioral dyscontrol in the current regulatory environment. This legislation provides needed clarity about abuse and neglect which will allow more providers to say "yes" to kids with complex needs.

Ensure children have access to specialty services not available within Oregon

There are rare occasions when Oregon's current continuum of care is unable to serve children and youth with very specialized needs. In these rare cases, we need to be able to provide life-saving care, even if it is out of state. This legislation gives ODHS the ability to make rational decisions when, in rare occasions, care that is not available in Oregon can be obtained out of state via a well vetted and monitored programs process.