

2/2/2026

Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dr. Kara Connelly. I have been a pediatric endocrinologist at OHSU/Doernbecher for 13 years and the Medical Director of the Doernbecher Gender Clinic for 10 years. I am directly impacted by issues addressed in HB4088 and thank you for your consideration to support local medical providers so that we can continue to provide Oregonians with excellent medical care, and so that medical decisions made by providers and their patients are protected from entities that should not have a role in the provision of care.

I take my oath as a medical provider to care for patients and have watched local and national colleagues struggle with the moral and ethical dilemma of upholding their oath and continuing to provide care, while facing ongoing harassment from the public, legal threats from other states for both civil and criminal penalties, and overreach of federal policies into what should be states' rights issues.

Providers are terrified. The political and legal threats, in addition to fears about doxxing, have had a chilling effect on individual providers and clinics. Our clinic has faced multiple death threats over the past 5-6 years, with the clinic and providers being doxxed by social media influencers and biased journalists. Specialty clinics at other institutions in Oregon have removed their websites entirely, causing confusion for Oregonians about which programs remain open and resulting in an influx of new referrals to our program, which we do not have the capacity to take on.

Rural Oregonians have been hit especially hard. Over the last 10 years, my team has made concerted efforts to build coalitions across the state so that patients do not have to travel to get care. We were at a point where we had local champions willing to offer gender affirming care in Central Oregon, Lane County, Salem, and along 84. The political and legal threats, in addition to fears about doxxing, have had a chilling effect on individual providers and clinics. This means that families are now having to travel 3 or more hours for follow-up visits and medication administration every 3 to 5 months. Some families have had to delay care due to transportation issues and concerns about road safety during winter months. It also means that our clinic volume and wait times have grown again, at a time when patients and families are already experiencing high degrees of anxiety about access, resulting in increased stress on the clinical team and forcing us into adding clinics to accommodate needs, risking provider burnout.

Regarding burnout, the moral injury and anxiety clinicians are experiencing cannot be understated. My team celebrates anytime the clock hits 2pm because it means that it is 5pm is DC and no new bad actions will have occurred that day. We are hearing regularly about other state hospital programs whether surgical or in our scope of practice pausing care or closing due to their state not having enough laws in place to protect them. We've also recognized that while HB2002 in 2023 set up protections for our clinical team, it did not extend to our invaluable clinic staff and administrators.

Our compassion for our patients and our commitment to our core values mean we will not stop providing care, but that does not mean that there is no physical or emotional toll. Colleagues have regularly described feeling like there is impending doom lingering on the horizon, which is having impacts on sleep, mechanisms for self-care, and interpersonal relationships. They are taking proactive steps to take care of themselves so that they can take care of others, but this is not enough when the threat is systemic.

This is where HB4088 comes in. It is both a practical and a necessary procedural step that the state of Oregon can take to communicate that providers and our teams matter, and that we are as protected as we can be as we keep doing the jobs we love. Knowing that we will be further protected from the overreach from other states and the federal government, and that this protection extends out to anyone on our teams committed to this care, increases confidence that upholding our oath and ethical codes will not result in undue punishment. Any opportunity states and systems have to reduce anxieties and negative legal implications for frontline providers and their patients is urgent. Thank you for your time and I encourage your support of this bill.