



OREGON PSYCHIATRIC  
PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION

Date: January 28, 2019

To: The Honorable Laurie Monnes Anderson, Chair  
The Honorable Dennis Linthicum Vice-Chair  
Members of the Senate Health Care Committee

From: Craig Zarling, MD, Co-Chair  
Maya Lopez, MD, Co-Chair  
Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association Legislative Committee

RE: Position statement on SB 140

Chair Monnes Anderson, Vice Chair Linthicum and members of the Senate Health Care Committee:

The Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association (OPPA), a district branch of the American Psychiatric Association, was established in 1966. The OPPA is an organization for psychiatric medical doctors in Oregon who seek to ensure humane and effective care for persons with mental illness, including substance use disorders, and compassion for their families.

OPPA supports SB 140, which establishes the Emergency Department Boarding Pilot in the Oregon Health Authority and provides grants to hospitals to determine the effectiveness of strategies in the provision of treatment for people experiencing a behavioral health crisis in the emergency department. The bill also establishes an important 13-member task force to develop comprehensive recommendations but it doesn't include physicians who work with individuals in crisis.

The OPPA urges the committee to adopt amendments to specifically include an emergency physician, a psychiatric physician and a mental health nurse practitioner on the task force. Too often, community providers make plans for patients that do not take into account some of the medical-psychiatric considerations that are critical for an individual's success. Making a solid medication plan with the patient should also involve the individual's psychiatrist to ensure that the medication plan is safe, effective, and realistically accessible. When physician and mental health nurse practitioner participation does not occur, an individual can worsen, requiring additional resources, such as a short stay at the Unity Center, rather than being proactively addressed by their psychiatrist. Some of the barriers are due to medications.

The task force is a good start but we recognize a systems approach is needed. We all recognize that other challenges should be addressed:

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- 1) There are an inadequate number of state hospital beds for civil patients due to the criminalization of mental illness;
- 2) There is a shortage of community inpatient psychiatric beds closer to patients' homes and their communities;
- 3) There is a shortage of acute treatment beds for older adults;
- 4) Civil commitment laws are outdated; and
- 5) There are few to no community placements for those with intractable anosognosia, a symptom that causes some individuals to deny they are ill and who therefore refuse to take medications.

The OPPA hopes that the legislature will seek to address the challenges that individuals face in a comprehensive way and SB 140 is one very important part of much-needed improvement to our state mental health system. Please consider passing this bill.

Thank you.