

February 3, 2023

The Honorable Deb Patterson, Chair  
The Honorable Cedric Hayden, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Health Care

VIA email and OLIS

RE: Support for SB 486 per diem payments

Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics is a non-profit organization with facilities that include Salem Hospital, West Valley Hospital in Dallas, and Salem Health Medical Group primary and specialty clinics spread throughout the mid-Willamette Valley. Salem Health serves patients in Marion and Polk, as well as Benton, Lincoln, and Yamhill counties with acute care, urgent care, primary, and specialty care.

The Covid-19 pandemic challenged Oregon's health care system in ways that we've never experienced. Even as hospitalizations due to Covid-19 have tapered, Salem Hospital and West Valley Hospital continue to experience record daily census.

There are several root problems, but the main one is simple: we are unable to find enough post-acute beds to house patients who no longer need acute care, but who are not well enough to transition to a home setting. Salem Health as an organization routinely boards approximately 90 patients who are waiting for post-acute beds. When patients no longer need acute care, reimbursement ceases to flow to the hospital – yet we continue to provide care. We are proud to take care of our neighbors, but this is not an efficient use of acute care resources.

This is financially unsustainable and risks reducing access to care in the communities we serve. Our ability to admit patients is limited to the extent that we are boarding patients.

SB 486 addresses this problem by requiring OHA and CCOs to pay a per diem for patients whose discharge is delayed due to circumstances beyond the hospital's control. While this will help, it should be considered one small step toward restoring a strong and sustainable continuum of health care for Oregonians. The long-term solution is better access to post-acute care.

If you have lingering questions about the impacts of this bill on Salem Health, please don't hesitate to reach out. We are committed to working with you to ensure that all Oregonians have access to the right care at the right time.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Mester Wolfe, RN  
President & CEO