



February 8, 2023

Senate Committee on Health Care

The Honorable Sen. Deb Patterson, Chair

The Honorable Sen. Cedric Hayden, Vice Chair

Dear Chair Patterson and Vice Chair Hayden,

As Oregon's public academic health center, OHSU has a unique role in serving our state. Through our three missions – research, education and health care – our members work every day to improve the health and well-being of every Oregonian.

The challenges hospitals and the dedicated individuals who provide care have been facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent RSV and flu waves this last winter are well documented. Unfortunately, though these health crises have abated, the ongoing challenge with capacity in our hospitals has not. The reasons for this are numerous and unlikely to be solved anytime soon. As others have noted, some of the leading drivers are an increase in behavioral health needs, the lowest hospital bed capacity in the nation, and patients with health care needs that were long deferred or who have prolonged stays after no longer needing hospital level care. In 2022 patients at OHSU experienced 8,238 avoidable bed days.

As a hospital, we are both the front door for people in need of care and for many the option of last resort. At any given time, OHSU is providing care to dozens of patients with health care needs that are severe enough to need care in a health care setting, but not so severe that they need to be in a hospital. These individuals are facing the crisis of a lack of access to post-acute care, and hospitals are often in a position where we must absorb the cost of providing care to these individuals.

The loss of capacity that is experienced as a result of not being able to place patients in post-acute care means we are not able to take transfers of patients in need of tertiary and quaternary care from rural and regional resource hospitals throughout the state.

The legislation before you, Senate Bill 486, does not solve this problem; however, until solutions can be put in place that increase access to post-acute care outside of hospitals this is a reasonable approach. This will fund the care our clinicians and care teams are providing today where there is currently no reimbursement. OHSU offers full support for this legislation with the understanding that this should be viewed as a bridge, and the state should prioritize finding solutions that ensure patients can access the care they need in the right place at the right time including better funding post-acute care settings to achieve that goal.

Hospitals and emergency departments throughout Oregon serve a lifesaving role in providing acute care and as a safety net for individuals unable to receive care anywhere else. Unfortunately, hospitals are the highest cost option. Until there is a safe stable environment for patients in need of post-acute care, hospitals must provide them the care they need. It is more important than ever that the state focus its attention on improving the underlying situation. Hospitals cannot sustain this fundamental breakdown in the system of care for much longer.

I thank you for your time and consideration of this legislation and for the sponsors, Sen. Patterson, Sen. Lieber and Rep. Goodwin for bringing this issue forward. OHSU looks forward to working with you in its role as the state academic health center to ensure Oregonians, no matter where they live, have access to the quality care they deserve.

Sincerely,

Joe Ness, M.H.A., R.Ph.
Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, OHSU Health