

March 21, 2023

RE: HB 3592

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of HB 3592. I am a physician specialized in Emergency Medicine and have practiced in that capacity at Legacy Mt Hood Medical Center serving it's surrounding communities for over 20 years.

Our Obstetrics/Gynecology colleagues are amongst our most frequently consulted specialists and have been essential to our medical center and the care of our patients. Our Family Birth Center is not just about birthing children as the name might imply. Our OB/GYN's attend to a wide spectrum of critical gynecologic and obstetrical emergencies, many of which are extremely time sensitive. In the setting of pregnancy related emergencies, there is the potential for one critical patient to quickly become two or more critical patients. OB/GYN medicine and nursing is very specialized with a myriad of unique details to attend to for both mother and newborn. Our Family Birth Center acts as a very well oiled machine delivering exceptional specialized care in this area. It is honestly difficult to imagine getting through a single shift without this critical group of specialists by our side.

A current example of why legislation such as HB 3592 is further warranted would be the recent closure by Legacy Health System of it's Family Birth Center at Mt Hood Medical Center. At the time of this testimony, Legacy has not yet been granted by the Oregon Health Authority a waiver of approval for this closure, yet it has been closed. It is situations such as this where HB 3592's necessity commands even greater attention, further strengthening the laws designed to disallow such acts.

Mt Hood Medical Center serves a huge geographic area. In addition to Gresham (Oregon's fourth largest city), it also covers much of East Portland, as well as Troutdale, Wood Village, Fairview, Boring, Corbett,

Kelso, Orient, Sandy, Eagle Creek, Estacada, Rhododendron, Welches, Government Camp, and extending even further rurally. Patients often travel 20-45+ minutes to get to this facility, with the next closest hospitals being Portland Adventist Medical Center on SE 102nd Ave in Portland, or out in Hood River. Additionally, the Emergency Department (ED) is Legacy Health's highest volume ED in Oregon and one of the busiest in the state, seeing well over 50,000 patients in 2022.

The patient population of Gresham, East Portland, and much of the surrounding area has been considered "underserved" for decades. A substantial percentage of this patient population has significant barriers to health access in areas of language, transportation, addiction, poverty, education, immigration and much more, and all of it out of proportion to the remainder of the larger Portland metropolitan area. One need not look hard to find a host of national news articles over the past couple of years detailing increased negative outcomes surrounding pregnancy and minorities.

Without maternity services at Mt Hood Medical Center, all expectant and laboring mothers will be required to travel to Legacy Randall Children's Hospital another 30+ minutes away. Should they present to Mt Hood Medical Center instead, they will immediately be transferred to Randall's via LifeFlight helicopter or other emergent transport, as availability allows, and with all the additional costs and risks found therein. On a similar note, it has also repeatedly been in the news that EMS has been at its own critically overwhelmed levels. The expectation that EMS will also then travel this extra distance with all expectant or laboring patients will only further strain this system's burden as well.

Those patients who are too actively laboring to transfer will have to deliver in the ED by a staff who is largely untrained and inexperienced in the art of obstetrics, unable to start epidurals or provide any pain control due to lack of fetal monitoring capabilities. This is while that same staff simultaneously manages multiple other critical medical and traumatic emergencies, as well as violent/combatative mental health and substance abusing patients, often in an already overwhelmed state. An Emergency Department is a chaotic, unpredictable, and at times dangerous environment. It is no place to be having babies!!

Closing the maternity facility at a hospital such as Mt Hood Medical Center will undoubtedly result in increased morbidity and mortality for the community, and most especially for the underserved populations as described above. This is but just one example of why I urge you to strongly consider approving HB 3592 in support of woman's health, as well as fostering equality in access to the most basic aspects of healthcare.

Thank you for your attention to this important and timely matter.

Respectfully,
Daniel R. Berger, MD