

February 7, 2024

The Honorable Deb Patterson, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health Care

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RE: SB 1507 – Public Guardians

Senator Patterson, Members of the Committee:

Salem Health is a nonprofit health system serving the mid-Willamette Valley. We provide primary, specialty, urgent, and acute care at locations from Woodburn to Salem to Dallas. Our mission is to improve the health of the people and communities we serve. That mission spans all operations of Salem Health, from primary care clinics to our busy emergency departments and hospitals.

Salem Health is pleased to support Senate Bill 1507 with the -1 amendment, which will increase the number of public guardians and allow for more supported decision-making by their clients.

Like other hospitals in Oregon and across the country, Salem Health has seen a dramatic increase in the number of patients experiencing discharge difficulties. These patients no longer need acute care but may have co-occurring conditions and/or behavioral health problems. These challenges make finding a post-acute care setting extremely difficult, particularly when the patient does not have family or friends to provide supported decision making or hold health care power of attorney. On any given day, Salem Health has an average of 30 patients waiting for discharge.

Oregon's Public Guardian Program is extremely effective. However, even with a significant funding increase in 2021, the office still lacks capacity. Furthermore, they lack some needed flexibility to offer a range of services to help keep clients engaged in decision making as much as possible.

SB 1507 with the -1 amendment addresses this problem head on with an innovative program designed to add both capacity and flexibility that supports patient decision-making whenever possible. We believe passage of SB 1507 will help reduce the number of Oregonians who currently languish in hospital beds, waiting for safe discharge to the appropriate level of care. This will increase the number of hospital beds available to others who do need acute care.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Nester Wolfe, RN MSN NEA-BC  
President & CEO