

To: Senate Committee on Healthcare

From: Joseph Sontgerath, MD

Date: February 16, 2025

Re: Physician in support of SB 951

As an independently practicing physician in the Portland area, I support Senate Bill 951. While practicing for private equity and corporate-run practices in Nevada, I've witnessed firsthand the erosion of patient care when profit-driven corporations infiltrate medicine. That's why I strongly urge the Oregon legislature to prioritize Senate Bill 951 and close the loopholes that allow these corporations to put profits over patients.

Many Oregonians may not realize that corporations are increasingly influencing their healthcare. Through complex structures like Management Service Organizations and "friendly physician" models, corporations are essentially practicing medicine without directly employing physicians, subverting laws meant to protect patients. This allows them to prioritize shareholder returns over the well-being of individuals seeking care.

I saw the devastating consequences of these models during the pandemic while practicing in Nevada. During the initial COVID shutdown, the focus of the corporation I worked for shifted to minimizing profit loss. Staff were cut, wages were decreased, and personal protective equipment was diverted to other states where the corporation had more assets. I was forced to deliver substandard care, seeing too many patients in too little time and with too few resources. This is not the kind of healthcare Oregonians deserve.

Contrast that with my current practice: an independent, democratic group of physicians who adapt to meet the needs of the patients they serve. As a group, we make monthly and even weekly decisions about staffing needs. For instance, during the recent Oregon Nurses Association strike, we made multiple adjustments to our schedule, shifting our workforce later into the night to accommodate the changes in staffing with the strike workers. That kind of dynamic practice does not happen in corporate-run groups.

The "corporate practice of medicine" doctrine exists for a reason: to prevent the inherent conflict of interest between a corporation's obligation to its shareholders and a physician's duty to their patients. When corporations are allowed to dictate medical decisions, the focus inevitably shifts away from the patient's best interests.

Senate Bill 951 is crucial to safeguarding the integrity of our healthcare system. It will close the loopholes that allow corporations to manipulate the system and ensure that medical decisions are made by doctors, not accountants. It will protect the trust between patients and their physicians, allowing doctors to focus on providing the best possible care without undue corporate influence.

This isn't about hindering innovation or preventing collaboration. It's about ensuring that the primary focus of healthcare remains the patient. Oregon has the opportunity to lead the way in

protecting patients from the negative impacts of corporate medicine. Let's prioritize patient well-being over corporate profits and pass Senate Bill 951. Our health depends on it.

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