

Emerson Levy
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
House District 53



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 20th, 2025

Chair Hartman, Vice-Chairs Nguyen and Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Emerson Levy, and I am the State Representative for House District 53, representing parts of Bend, Redmond, and Sisters. Thank you for your time this morning. I have heard firsthand the profound impact that current regulations on licensed residential care for children, as well as the abuse investigation thresholds related to the use of restraint, have had on my community.

Over the last couple of years, central Oregon has lost several services and providers. We are losing staff in our school systems. We are a desert of services, despite our youth suicide rate being double the state average. Therefore, I want to focus on three things in my community: the lack of beds for youth experiencing acute crises, the impacts on our public schools, and the closure of vital residential services.

Right now there are zero beds in central Oregon for youth that are in acute crisis. Children in central Oregon facing a behavioral health crisis often find themselves stuck in the emergency departments of St. Charles Health System hospitals for weeks, due to a severe shortage of appropriate residential placements and community-based services. In 2024 alone, 110 children were held in St. Charles' emergency departments for over 24 hours. When there is a bed available in the Valley, families are often forced to transport their kid in crisis alone through the pass. This is a wildly unsafe and untenable situation.

Secondly, my school districts in central Oregon are also feeling the impacts of this issue. You have already had the opportunity to hear from Superintendent Cline, who outlined teachers who have been put on leave and required to go through an OTIS investigation, to be found not in violation. We have teachers showing up wearing rugby gear for protection, again the theme emerges of unsafe and untenable.

Lastly, we have lost residential programs in Central Oregon. When the Academy of Sisters closed earlier this year, one of the reasons cited for the closure was our legislative body. In communities like ours there are no other options. This means more affluent families who can afford 40k+ must go out of state for residential services, while other families have limited to no options.

Emergency departments act as early warning systems for the state of our healthcare systems, but our schools are also critical indicators of children's well-being. In Oregon, schools are witnessing firsthand the growing emotional and behavioral challenges that children face, from self-harm to

aggression. School administrators and staff have made it clear that current policies are creating unsafe environments for both students and faculty.

When a child is in need of help, accessing support should be simple and direct. Unfortunately, that is not the case in Oregon today. Our children deserve better. We must prioritize solutions that improve access to behavioral health care. House Bill 3835 is a positive step forward, aiming to establish consistent and reasonable regulations that will ensure the safety of children in both residential placements and schools. I urge your support for this important legislation. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Levy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emerson Levy

State Representative, House District 53