



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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The Honorable Kate Brown
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Dear Governor Brown,

Oregon's mental health system has been in crisis long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Rankings of state readiness to treat mental health consistently place our state at or near the bottom of the nation, and Oregonians suffer from higher than average levels of suicide, depression and anxiety.

The lack of inpatient bed capacity in Oregon is evident across our state, with emergency departments, jails and frontline responders bearing the brunt of the shortfall. The pressure is straining our entire system, with facilities like Cedar Hills Hospital, Unity Center for Behavioral Health and the Oregon State Hospital regularly operating at or near full capacity.

For patients and families seeking resources and access to care, the lack of available beds is evident. Dozens of newspaper articles and independent reports over the last several years have highlighted the challenges Oregonians face in getting the care they need. This lack of treatment options is contributing to our persistent challenges in homelessness, student mental health, suicide, substance abuse and recidivism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the capacity limits of our healthcare system. The Oregon Health Authority has made clear that we don't have enough hospital beds to meet our basic needs in this moment. Emergency departments are closing to all but the most serious cases, which has left Oregonians in mental health crisis without anywhere to receive safe treatment.

As you are aware, the City of Wilsonville has fully approved plans submitted by Universal Health Services for a 100-bed mental health treatment facility, yet the Oregon Health Authority has withheld the Certificate of Need necessary to begin construction. In light of Oregon's persistent mental health crisis and the expected 18-month length of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for this facility could not be more clear.

This shovel-ready project would provide a \$40 million infusion in private, out-of-state investment at a fragile economic time and create hundreds of construction and healthcare jobs. It would also provide vital revenues to the state and local governments through the payment of property, income and corporate taxes.

With the capacity of our mental health and hospital systems already so far behind, Oregonians in crisis do not have time to wait. Through your emergency declaration, you have the authority to waive the Certificate of Need requirement for this facility so that it can immediately begin construction. We strongly urge you to do so.

Respectfully,

Casey Kulla
Chair

Mary Starrett
Vice-Chair

Richard L. "Rick" Olson
Commissioner

B.O. 20-144

Organizations and Businesses

- Portland Business Alliance
- Clackamas County Business Alliance
- Wilsonville Chamber of Commerce
- Union Gospel Mission
- Dual Diagnosis Anonymous
- Cascade AIDS Project
- Beyond Well Solutions
- Oregon Harbor of Hope
- Oregon Integrated Health & Dr. Vanessa Esteves
- Oregon Recovers
- Basic Rights Oregon

Government entities

- City of Wilsonville

Elected officials

- Kurt Schrader, Congressman
- Lynn Peterson, President of Metro
- Sam Chase, Metro Councilor
- Tim Knapp, Mayor of Wilsonville
- Denny Doyle, Mayor of Beaverton
- Kent Studebaker, Mayor of Lake Oswego
- Senator Mark Hass, District 14, candidate for Oregon Secretary of State
- Senator Brian Boquist
- Senator Kim Thatcher
- Senator Tim Knopp
- John Wendland, Lake Oswego City Councilor
- Mary Starrett, Yamhill County Commissioner
- Dick Schouten, Washington County Commissioner
- Dr. Satya Chandragiri, past president Oregon Psychiatric Association, Salem-Keizer School Board Member

Accepted by Yamhill County
Board of Commissioners on
4/30/2020 by Board Order
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