

3/18 Amendment for Senate Bill 811

Reforms applications for licensure to maintain and operate a residential facility.

Digest: The Act adds new requirements for getting a license to run certain types of long-term care facilities. Adds new requirements for obtaining a license to operate a residential facility or adult foster home. Requires the Department of Human Services and the Oregon Health Authority to inspect residential facilities and adult foster homes under certain conditions. Permits the department to extend the duration of an adult foster home license to two years if the home has been found in substantial compliance for three consecutive years. Directs the department to adopt additional standards for obtaining a memory care endorsement.

My name is Melissa Fisher, resident of Hillsboro.

Sponsors Senator Gelser Blouin and Senator Deb Patterson, members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony today in support of amending senate bill 811.

I want to begin with a question that I will provide my answer to at the end of my testimony.

How do we ensure state agencies are actually protecting the residents of our state?

Imagine you find yourself suddenly needing to support the care of a relative that has experienced a series of serious delusions and medical emergencies that eventually gets them hospitalized, and then after a week, they are transferred to a nursing home bed and kept in limbo for over six months while you go through all the motions to try and help them because they have no one else. You secure power of attorney, arrange the interview to get them the Medicaid housing benefit, and begin desperately searching for open beds close enough to you that you can check on them, and you keep being met with NO VACANCY anywhere you would approve of. Of course, your search is likely uninformed, because you haven't ever done this before and know of no place to learn more about the facilities other than their websites and tours. So, you do your very best to just figure it out.

Eventually, you believe you hit the jackpot. A new facility out in Sandy JUST opened up and they have a bed that accepts Medicaid! The website is great, and the pictures are lovely and despite not having any reviews yet, you meet with the administrator at the nursing facility your relative is at and they conduct the interview, you ask all the questions, and then you do the paperwork and are given a date for the move! You are elated! Of course, you first go and visit the facility just to make sure. It's new, everyone is so nice, the décor is beautiful, right down to the coffee machine in the lobby and a bowl of chocolate mints next to it, it's a dream. You can finally sit back, and breathe a minute, rest assured that you asked everything you needed to, and your relative will be so happy and well cared for here. And this interior! So lovely, right? All is well, right? Right?

WRONG. That decision in this story was us choosing Mt Hood Senior Living.

What I just shared with you is our family's story. And it is not just ours – it is a story repeating itself all over our state now. It happens more often than not that families are faced with a forced and urgent decision to make after an event that reveals their loved one cannot safely stay in the housing they had. With very little time and even less information, we place our trust in the licensures and inspections of the facilities by our state agencies.

If our licensure process for community-based care aren't more rigorous, consumers like me are inadvertently putting our loved ones at greater risk. There needs to be more onus on those seeking licensure to provide greater inform and training and improved oversight by the agencies to protect residents and their representatives. And in the case of dementia / memory care facilities, additional elopement notifications and transfer procedures.

Of course, the amendments being proposed in senate bill 811 are just the start. For true improved transparency and consumer protection, we will need to overhaul how Oregonians are obtaining information about long term care facilities and where they are sourcing it from. The ODHS long term care licensing facility search is nothing more than a "check-the-box" website. I didn't even know of it until well after I was caught up in the chaos of the Mt Hood closure. It was in fact an ombudsman who tipped me off that the place they sent my aunt to when they closed Mt Hood was rated worse on the ODHS site than the place she was removed from. If the agency didn't use their own site, how can I?

So back to my question. How do we ensure state agencies are actually protecting the residents of our state?

First, by supporting amended senate bill 811.

Then second, please take to task mandating that the Oregon Department of Human Services build a truly consumer-centric long term care search site for Oregonians and require operating facilities post links on their websites and Google my Business listings.

If I can easily source reviews online for nearly every good ever made on the planet, travel, and restaurants down to health inspection score information provided through partnerships with local governments, but NOT for long term care licensure status, violations, inspections and notices on the places I am considering placing my loved one, or someone considering for themselves, how is that not neglecting to actually protect Oregonians?

Thank you.