



Oregon's Voice for Long Term Care & Senior Housing

February 8, 2021

House Committee on Human Services
Oregon State Capitol 900 Court St.
NE.
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Support for House Bill 2394 with amendments

Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs Leif and Ruiz, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Libby Batlan, and I serve as Senior Vice President of Government Relations at the Oregon Health Care Association (OHCA). OHCA represents long term care providers across the state. More than 64,000 Oregonians receive long term care services in either licensed care facilities or in their home every day.

We were pleased to work with the bill's sponsor, Representative Prusak, and the Alzheimer's Association on consensus amendments. The forthcoming amendments will help ensure that seniors living in long term care communities across Oregon maintain connection with loved ones during public health emergencies in a manner that is person-centered and implementable for providers. OHCA is pleased to support this measure.

HB 2394, as amended, will require that all long term care providers include an isolation prevention plan in its emergency response plan. That plan will be used when a declared public health emergency or the facility's infectious disease outbreak plan disallows in-person visitation. Facilities must also have technology and/or communication platforms available to residents to use for virtual visits and ensures that, as necessary, staff will help residents navigate using that technology. Importantly, the bill makes clear that residents have a choice as to whether they engage with loved ones virtually, ensuring no resident feels required to communicate with anyone they do not wish to. Lastly, the bill allows ODHS to use funds from the Quality Care Fund to help providers pay for technology if they need it.

While Oregon has seen lower infection rates in long term care than other states, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted long term care residents, workers, and providers particularly hard. The individuals our members serve are among the most at-risk Oregonians for exposure, hospitalization, or death as a result of COVID-19. In Oregon, half of our fatalities have been Oregonians 80 years of age and older alone, and nearly 90% have been those 60 years and

older. Additionally, 86% of Oregonians who have died from the virus have had an underlying health condition.

Protecting public health and reducing physical transmission of the virus has been priority number one. On February 29, 2020, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) initiated steps to prohibit in-person, indoor visitation for nursing, assisted living, and residential care facilities to combat the spread of COVID-19. While limited outdoor visitation and compassionate care visits have been allowed, fall and winter months in Oregon are not ideal for outdoor visits, and some residents do not have family who live in the state. Ultimately, the tragic reality for residents and their family members is that they have been separated for nearly a year.

This separation has taken a devastating toll on the mental and emotional wellbeing of residents who reside in long term care communities. Rates of depression among this population has increased over the last year. We must remember that mental health *is* health. Providers have worked incredibly hard to offer virtual visitation options for residents and make sure life enrichment activities are offered to facilitate safe connections and create community. Over the last year, we heard reports from some residents getting to connect virtually with family that hadn't been able to visit in the past. For some, it opened up new relationships and opportunities. Nevertheless, no in-person visits or hugs has taken a toll on our seniors during this pandemic.

OHCA is pleased to support this concept and grateful to the bill's sponsors for working with us on a consensus amendment. Thank you for your consideration of HB 2394.

Sincerely,

Libby Batlan
Senior Vice President of Government Relations
Oregon Health Care Association