

Letter in Support of SB 69

*Requesting an amendment to ensure equitable access to housing
for patients receiving Medication Assisted Treatment in their recovery*

January 28, 2021

Dear Chair Gelser and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery:

I am writing on behalf of Kaiser Permanente in support of SB 69. We greatly appreciate that the Oregon Health Authority has brought forth this bill, recognizing that changes to statute are needed to allow for multiple treatment models in housing, including harm reduction as well as abstinence-based recovery.

However, we request that the bill be amended slightly to ensure that its intent is fully achieved.

Our patient navigator team has found that patients receiving suboxone and other medication-assisted treatment (MAT) are often being excluded from access to housing due to stigma and misunderstanding about this evidence-based, federally recognized form of recovery.

Here are the words of one of our addiction support specialists, who works with our Medicaid patients who are accessing suboxone through primary care clinics:

I desperately want equity for patients with opioid use disorder, that brings them the same support and resources as those with other substance use disorders. At times, it can be challenging to connect people to resources for recovery that will champion the hard work they have accomplished in recovery, rather than demoralize it with continued stigma.

[The bill wording] feels very vague, and I feel that without strong wording recognizing that people who take medications for substance use disorders are in recognized recovery by the State, we will have continued backlash against people with opiate use disorder, at the same time when all health systems are being asked to expand access for this medication.

Additionally, our clinicians underscore that “recovery housing in some cases, rejects any individual on a prescribed medication that has addictive liability (either substance use or mental health related).”

Based on this feedback from our front-line experts, we respectfully request that SB 69 be revised to include a non-discrimination clause for individuals seeking recovery-based housing who have prescribed medication for either a substance use or mental health condition.

Specifically, we ask that Section 2 (4) of SB 69 be amended to provide protection and inclusion in housing settings for people with opioid use disorder using MAT as well as people on a prescribed medication for mental health condition. In addition, the “program of recovery” definition should be expanded to include recovery in all forms, including a variety of practices such as (but not limited to) MAT and other prescribed medications, 12-step programs, spiritual practices, and more. The current language “and similar programs” will not suffice to overcome the misunderstanding and stigma around MAT and other evidence-based treatment modalities.

Adding specific, inclusive language to this bill will establish the statutory support our providers need to advocate on behalf of our vulnerable patients. We must ensure that people in recovery are not denied access to the housing they so desperately need to be successful and healthy in their recovery. An amended SB 69 will help move Oregon toward that shared goal.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide feedback on this bill. Kaiser Permanente supports its goals and we stand ready to assist in its success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Fauver".

Amy Fauver
Director, Government & Community Relations