

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

Prepared for OAHU

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Coronavirus Response Committee asks, “What’s most important to do NOW?”

The legislature’s Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response spent 5+ hours today sorting out what the state can do quickly to help individuals and businesses impacted by the pandemic. Committee co-chair, Rep. Paul Holvey (D-Eugene) said, “Our goal is to look at what we can do to enable them to stay safe, to survive, to have the income they need if they are having to stay home.”

The Governor said she may call a Special Session within a week to deal with the crisis.

Dozens of recommendations have been made dealing with housing and homelessness, expanding unemployment insurance, food security, family and sick leave, education, business taxes, support for independent contractors and more.

Some of the health care issues discussed today include:

Hospitals

Hospitals are categorized by their bed capacity. As they ramp up with expanded capacity to care for COVID-19 response, it should not change a hospital’s category or reimbursement rate. There is also a question about the financial stability, particularly for rural and small regional hospitals, as they have cancelled elective surgeries to clear space for COVID-19 patients, some have had revenues cut in half. The federal government is considering some relief for Critical Access Hospitals but state legislators are looking at what else they can do to ensure that hospitals stay open.

Physician Assistants

Allow PAs to practice within their scope without supervision throughout the duration of the emergency. This would require a change in state law. Rep. Holvey said, “We haven’t seen much opposition to this idea.” He went on to say, “This is one of those scope-of-practice issues during this pandemic, should we have flexibility?”

While the committee was discussing this agenda item, they received a text from the Oregon Medical Board saying the board had just taken emergency action:

- Allowing emeritus physicians and PAs to receive payment for their services. Previous rules restricted them to volunteer activities.
- Lifted the 240 days per biennium limit for Locum Tenens physicians and PAs during the emergency.
- Implemented a streamlined process to quickly reactivate licenses for Retired/Inactive/Lapsed physicians and PAs.
- Opened up Oregon licensing for out-of-state physicians and PAs so they can practice here.

The committee is scheduled to meet again at 9 am Tuesday.

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