

August 7th, 2026

Attorney General Dan Rayfield
Oregon Department of Justice
1162 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Attorney General Rayfield:

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed affiliation between Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics and Santiam Hospital & Clinics and urge the Oregon Department of Justice to complete its review and issue a decision in a timely manner that meets the urgency of the situation.

As a Member of Congress representing Oregon communities that depend on access to quality healthcare close to home, I understand the critical role local hospitals play in supporting the health, safety, and economic vitality of our region. For more than 70 years, Santiam Hospital has served as a cornerstone of healthcare in the Santiam Canyon and surrounding communities. As one of Oregon's few remaining independent, community-based hospitals, it provides emergency, inpatient, outpatient, primary, specialty, surgical, and maternity care to thousands of Oregonians, many of whom have limited alternatives.

Rural healthcare providers continue to face substantial financial and operational pressures. Hospitals such as Santiam and Salem Health serve significant numbers of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries and rely on federal reimbursement, workforce programs, emergency-preparedness investments, grants, and other federal resources to maintain essential services. As a Member of Congress, I have a responsibility to help ensure that these investments are used effectively to preserve access to care, particularly in rural and medically underserved communities.

I appreciate the Oregon Health Authority's careful consideration of this matter and its July 31 decision granting the requested emergency exemption from the Health Care Market Oversight review. That decision recognized the urgency of Santiam's circumstances and completed OHA's review of the proposed affiliation. The transaction, however, cannot be finalized without written approval from the Attorney General, making the Department of Justice's timely consideration particularly important.

Public reporting has noted Santiam's stronger financial performance in prior years and narrow recent profits. At the same time, the hospital has identified rapidly deteriorating financial conditions, increasing loan-compliance concerns, and significant near-term technology costs that threaten its continued ability to provide care. In particular, Santiam must replace its electronic health record system before its current contract expires in 2027 – an undertaking the hospital has stated it cannot realistically finance on its own.

These pressures should be evaluated not only through a snapshot of recent financial results, but in light of the hospital's ability to sustain operations, retain its workforce, meet its obligations, modernize critical systems, and continue providing safe and reliable care over the long term. Delays create uncertainty for patients, employees, physicians, and the communities Santiam serves, while making necessary planning and investment more difficult.

The proposed affiliation offers a locally focused path toward stability. Unlike transactions involving an out-of-state corporation or private-equity ownership, the affiliation would keep healthcare decisions rooted in the Mid-Willamette Valley while preserving Santiam's local identity and community-based mission. Salem Health has committed at least \$61 million to strengthen services, modernize facilities, support critical infrastructure, and assist with the electronic-health-record transition. Salem Health has also stated that the partnership would support and expand maternity services, among other investments in care.

Most importantly, this affiliation would protect access to healthcare for rural Oregonians. Residents throughout the Santiam Canyon and surrounding communities depend on local emergency care, surgical services, primary and specialty care, women's health and maternity services, and coordinated community-based programs. Many patients already face transportation barriers, workforce shortages, geographic isolation, and limited alternatives. If Santiam's condition deteriorates or services are disrupted, patients and families – not institutions – will bear the consequences.

At its core, this matter is about ensuring that Oregon families continue to receive reliable healthcare close to home. The proposed affiliation presents an opportunity to stabilize an essential community hospital, strengthen its infrastructure, preserve local services and governance, and protect the substantial public investments that support care in the region.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage the Oregon Department of Justice to give timely and careful consideration to the significant public benefits associated with this affiliation and, consistent with its responsibility to protect the public interest, allow the transaction to move forward without unnecessary delay.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to protecting access to quality healthcare for Oregonians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Janelle S. Bynum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress