

Public Comments received after emergency exemption public comment period

The [Health Care Market Oversight](#) (HCMO) program reviews proposed health care business deals to make sure they support Oregon's goals of health equity, lower costs, increased access, and better care. This document presents public comments related to the Emergency Exemption filed by Salem Health and Santiam Hospital & Clinics. OHA [accepted public comments through July 24, 2026](#). The public comments below are comments received after July 24, 2026, until July 31, 2026 when OHA issued its determination. Public comments were received via email to hcmo.info@oha.oregon.gov, voicemail, or by filling out the [Public Comment Form](#). Comments are presented below in the order received and may include typos or misspellings. Personal contact information for individuals has been removed.

OHA expresses no views on the substance of these comments, and their publication does not constitute an endorsement by OHA of the views expressed.

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1. 7/25/26

To the Oregon Health Authority,

I understand that Salem Health and Santiam Hospital are asking the Oregon Health Authority to grant an emergency exemption to expedite their proposed merger.

I'm concerned that a decision with such significant, long-term consequences for patients and consumers could be rushed through without the full review it deserves. Hospital mergers can affect healthcare costs, patient choice and access to care for years to come.

The hospitals initially described this as a long-term partnership. Now they are asking OHA to treat it as an emergency because of Santiam Hospital's financial condition. Those claims deserve careful scrutiny before an emergency exemption is granted.

Please require a thorough, transparent review of this proposal and ensure any decision doesn't harm patients.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Pam Veelle

Jessie Hunt

Martha DeSantis

Elenie Smith

Taffany Weed

2. 7/26/26

Please approve the proposed affiliation between Salem Health and Santiam Hospital & Clinics without delay. I have worked for Santiam Hospital since 2019 and sincerely believe that this merger will be in the best interest of the patients, employees, and the greater community.

As a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator, I have had the privilege of helping to prepare expecting parents for their labor and birth experiences. As a part of the Family Birth Center team at Santiam, I have witnessed the high level of care that our nursing staff and providers offer to all of our patients. Among other reasons, this is why Santiam Hospital is frequently voted ""The Best Place to Have a Baby"" in the Willamette Valley,

Hospital leadership has always been devoted to providing access to the best healthcare possible for the rural communities surrounding Santiam. I have been supported in my role as an employee through sponsored education, and have had the honor to become an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant. The lactation team at Santiam is robustly supported, and we offer hundreds of appointments each year to new parents and babies - folks from the Santiam Canyon to Silverton, Salem,

Independence, Woodburn and beyond. Breastfeeding is one of the most powerful interventions to positively contribute to a child's lifelong health, and access to high-quality lactation support is critical to successful breastfeeding.

With support from hospital leadership and our community partner at Family Building Blocks, we have formed a connections group for new parents called ""Baby and Me."" The camaraderie, support, and friendship that we have seen grow out of this group for the local families embodies the spirit of Santiam Hospital & Clinics, and the personal care that we are encouraged to provide. It has been my privilege to work with the hundreds of families that I have been able to support through my time at Santiam. I urge the decision-makers to understand the powerful, long-lasting and broad impacts of retaining access to Santiam Hospital & Clinics.

Allison Gladney

3. 7/27/26

Please do not allow Salem Health and Santiam hospitals to use an emergency declaration to get around the lengthier process already in place to allow for enough time and public input to make an informed decision about their merger. Salem Health has captured a majority of the market share in Salem and the surrounding communities, and their motives are always about increasing revenue and capturing market share. Their motives are not about "helping" a less successful facility improve their services. They have operated as a for-profit "non-profit" for decades now. Even when they have millions of dollars in the bank, they claim to staff that "all hospitals are in dire circumstances" to justify staff layoffs. The people in the Santiam canyon are happy with their community hospital. A merger with Salem means all of the patients who previously lost care at Salem due to Salem's unwillingness to negotiate with Blue Cross will now have to go to Portland for their care, because when Santiam's current contract with Blue Cross ends in 2027, Salem is unlikely to suddenly start accepting that insurance. They have adamantly refused to hold open conversations with Blue Cross, preferring to keep all discussions private. The public deserves to know what these negotiations are about, especially when previously the hospital was insisting on a 35% increase in insurance reimbursement - without proof that this increase was justified. This ploy to get an emergency judgment on the Santiam/Salem merger is a thinly veiled attempt to circumvent an approval process that should be allowed to take plenty of time to determine whether the merger is a good idea, whether the involved

communities agree that it's a good idea, and how the Blue Cross patients will be impacted. This is not a good idea for our community, and it's time we stopped allowing Salem Health to monopolize care in this region. Competition is necessary in health care, as in many other fields. We cannot allow one hospital system to control prices, access, and insurance reimbursement. We have already seen this play out in other cities (Portland) and states. If in fact it is true that Santiam is at risk of closing, it's on the state to find a way to assist them instead of taking the easy road and believing that Salem Health is "rescuing" Santiam. Thank you.

Jane Harter

4. 7/27/26

I moved here from out of state and came to the Santiam Hospital to visit a family member while he was here. He was inpatient on the third floor and on multiple occasions I saw the staff treat him like their own family. When I walked in, you could tell that employees were happy to be here. The love for the patients and the love for each other reminded me of the small-town hospital from my hometown down south. I decided that I wanted to be a part of that and applied. I've been here for a few years now and let me say: the staff still treat the patients like family, they still care about patients- and each other. Santiam is doing a lot to grow and take better care of our canyon patients. In my humble opinion- Santiam is a jewel that we cannot afford to lose. We absolutely need to do everything that we can to protect what we have. If that means joining with Salem to prevent insolvency then that's what we must do. The Canyon needs us, and we need Salem.

Jenny Miller

5. 7/27/26

Tyler Freres [submitted a public comment](#).

6. 7/30/26

Hello,

I don't normally comment on matters like this, but after reading the many statements in support of this acquisition, one thing has stood out to me that I don't believe has been fully acknowledged.

It doesn't seem like the members of the Santiam community want Salem Health in their community so much as they want to maintain reasonable access to medical care. The message I hear is less, ""We want Salem Health,"" and more, ""Please don't let Santiam Hospital close,"" regardless of who the benefactor is. The community doesn't seem to be sharing a negative opinion of Santiam prior to this proposition. I would be interested to know whether the community would feel the same urgency for an expedited acquisition if they were not facing the immediate prospect of losing access to essential healthcare services.

I also find it concerning that, when this proposal was first introduced, the public was told this would be a mutually beneficial merger. Now, seemingly overnight, the message has changed to one of immediate necessity: that Santiam Hospital will have to close if Salem Health is not permitted to acquire it right away. That dramatic shift raises questions that I believe warrant this extra consideration.

I don't know if this acquisition is the best thing for the community. I do feel strongly that if it is approved, it should be with serious conditions that protect public interest. I thought the recommendations outlined in Comment 14 provided thoughtful and practical examples of the kinds of safeguards that should be considered.

Thank you.

Jane D.

7. 7/30/26

I am writing to voice my support of the proposed merger between Santiam Hospital and Salem Health. My husband and I are both Physician Assistants in family medicine. We have great respect for our leadership team and our colleagues, all of whom strive to do the best work they can within an imperfect healthcare landscape. It is also clear to us how highly the Santiam healthcare system is valued by patients in the Willamette Valley and beyond.

We acknowledge that Santiam is at a time of uncertainty and tumult. The challenges faced by small healthcare systems—well-articulated in many of the above letters—are becoming wholly unsustainable. It is clear that a strong partnership is the only path forward, not only for financial solvency, but also to expand services and provide the level of care that our patients need. Working in primary care, we see how great the needs are in our communities, and how many people and resources it takes to provide

adequate support. Salem Health is a fitting partner, with a commitment to serving the local community and working with Santiam to streamline and bolster each part of our healthcare system.

Of course, there will be many challenges to work through as the merger unfolds—this is a necessary and expected part of change. But we are confident in the ability of our leadership, colleagues, and hospital/clinic staff to navigate and negotiate these obstacles. We urge you to consider the impact of these hospitals on local community members, and support us in sustaining and expanding this impact for years to come.

Kelsey Porter & Ian Cavigli

8. 7/30/26

I implore you to quickly approve the Santiam Hospital Emergency Exemption application so that both hospitals can move forward with the proposed merger sooner rather than later. If the OHA makes Santiam Hospital adhere to the normal process, the additional time needed for this process to be completed will be detrimental to both entities and could be force Santiam Hospital to ultimately close their doors well before the process is completed

Rick Uram

About HCMO

The Healthcare Market Oversight Program reviews proposed health care business deals to make sure they support statewide goals related to cost, equity, access, and quality. For more info, you can connect with HCMO staff:

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