

State wants more time to stop ‘parking’ mental patients in ERs

By Jordan Schrader

The Olympian
Staff writer
August 22, 2014



Gov. Jay Inslee

TONY OVERMAN — Staff Photographer [Buy Photo](#)

State government says it can open more slots for detaining mentally ill patients but needs more time to do it.

Gov. Jay Inslee’s administration said Friday that it has identified an extra 145 beds, including some in Lakewood and Olympia, and authorized spending up to \$30 million to fill them.

But state lawyers asked the Washington Supreme Court for a four-month reprieve from the court's Aug. 7 ruling that it's illegal to leave people detained in emergency rooms waiting for mental health treatment.

About 200 people are now undergoing such improper "psychiatric boarding."

"Additional capacity cannot be created overnight," the state wrote.

"If the mandate is issued on August 27, 2014," lawyers wrote, "persons who present a likelihood of serious harm to themselves or others, or are gravely disabled and in need of care, will be required to be released immediately, regardless of whether they have a safe place to go."

[The 4:59 p.m. motion with the high court was filed jointly by the state and hospitals, health care workers and advocacy groups.](#)

Years of budget cuts have closed off space at the state psychiatric hospitals. The state says it needs an extra 120 days to start operating 95 beds, including:

- 10 in an unused wing of a building on the campus of Western State Hospital in Lakewood, available by November.
- 10 at the Thurston County evaluation and treatment center run by Behavioral Health Resources, available by November.
- 25 at Fairfax Hospital in Kirkland, 30 more at Fairfax's outpost in Everett and 20 at Cascade Behavioral Health in Tukwila, all to be available by October.

All of the those except for the beds near Western State are exceptionally expensive because they are at facilities too large to pull down federal matching money. Eventually, the state hopes to replace them with smaller facilities it is building.

Inslee will ask for more money in his budget request to the Legislature, which returns in January. Without that approval, the extra \$30 million would overspend the Department of Social and Health Services' budget.

That price tag includes the 50 beds that the Department of Social and Health Services has said it can have ready by Wednesday, the day it believes the court ruling takes effect without a reprieve.

DSHS said it has opened 10 beds at Eastern State Hospital near Spokane by hiring new psychiatrists, changed a rule to allow for at least 10 more beds at local boarding homes, and secured 12 beds at the Kirkland hospital and 18 at the Tukwila facility.

Jordan Schrader: 360-786-1826 jordan.schrader@thenewstribune.com [@Jordan_Schrader](https://twitter.com/Jordan_Schrader)

Read more here: <http://www.theolympian.com/2014/08/22/3281211/state-wants-more-time-to-stop.html?sp=/99/101/112/#storylink=cpy>

