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Dear Senate Human Services Committee Members,

I am a psychologist with a solo private practice in Eugene. I would like to apprise you of the problems in my community that affirm the need for laws that enforce mental health parity, such as SB 860. It is the worst kept secret in Lane County that several major insurers in the area have a history of skirting the state and federal mental health parity laws, to the detriment of their members. Some of the affected people are among our poorest residents, some are university graduate students, faculty and staff, small business owners, and the people who teach our children. As a provider of mental healthcare, I am on the frontlines and I am compelled to tell you what I see.

Barriers to Network Participation.

Mental health providers who would like to participate in networks are being ignored or turned away while Lane County residents struggle to find in network providers who are accepting new patients. Trillium, the coordinated care organization for OHP in Lane County, has been declining provider requests for network participation, claiming that they already have an adequate network. Moda Health can take months to respond to repeated network participation requests, if they respond at all.

Rate Cuts and Poor Reimbursement.

Mental healthcare providers in Lane County are being told that the treatment they provide today is worth less than it was a decade ago. In 2009, Regence arbitrarily cut rates for mental health services by 25-50%, forcing providers to choose between leaving the network or increasing their workload to compensate for lost income. Providence farms out their mental health benefits to Optum, a managed care company which reimburses so poorly that providers refuse to participate in the network. Rate cuts and poor reimbursement have been shown to decrease provider participation in networks and is the main contributor to network inadequacy. When insurance networks are inadequate, members have less choice of providers, wait longer for treatment, end up going out-of-network, or forego treatment altogether.

Restrictions on Treatment.

Optum, the company that manages mental health benefits for Providence, uses automatic clinical reviews based on appointment number and frequency to put pressure on providers to reduce treatment. Now Trillium is following suit for their OHP and Medicare Advantage plans. Effective February 1st, 2019, Trillium is requiring prior authorization for additional treatment of members who accumulate 25 outpatient mental health appointments in a calendar year across all types of services. These blanket treatment limitations are intimidating to providers, put pressure on them to reduce care, and place the greatest burden on providers who care for the sickest patients.

SB 860 offers Lane County mental health providers the hope that problems we have been aware of for years will finally be exposed and mental health parity will be appropriately enforced to protect our residents with mental health and substance use problems. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Melissa Todd, Ph.D.