



2/25/19

To: Senate Judiciary Committee  
From: Oregon Council for Behavioral Health (OCBH)  
Re: Testimony in support of SB 725 and pending amendments

The Oregon Council for Behavioral Health is the statewide member association comprised of non-profit and private behavioral health organizations that serve and treat individuals with Substance Use Disorders (SUD) and mental illness. We currently represent over 40 organizations and together provide the full continuum of behavioral healthcare from prevention to residential and outpatient treatment for the thousands of Oregonians living with the chronic diseases of addiction and mental illness.

We stand in support of SB 725, which serves to remove employment barriers through building additional structure and standardization into fitness determinations for Oregon's background check system.

Due, in part, to stigma, behavioral health rates have remained stagnant with some clinics having not seen an increase in rates since the inception of their CCO. This, coupled with the increasing minimum wage, has severely compromised BH providers' turnover rates. For our providers, the primary challenge is hiring and retaining experienced and qualified employees willing to work in a career with taxing demands.

The result of a destabilized workforce is a reduction in access. The current workforce crisis means our providers are able to serve fewer people in need of treatment at a time when the effects of Oregon's behavioral health crises are seen across sectors, impacting corrections, education, and housing.

Therefore, this session OCBH's primary priority is to stabilize our workforce. We seek to build a behavioral health system that prevents costly downstream effects and ensures vulnerable Oregonians receive the right services at the right time as close to their own community as is safe and possible.

SB 725 is part of the solution to this crisis. This bill removes barriers for individuals with minor criminal records, while still ensuring the safety of our most vulnerable populations. This is especially important for providing peer-supported treatment. Often times, the very criminal history that impedes someone's employment is related to the substance use disorder or mental illness that makes the individual qualified to serve as a peer.

OCBH asks for your support of SB 725.

Thank you,

Heather Jefferis, MA  
Executive Director  
Oregon Council for Behavioral Health