



March 7, 2019

Oregon Consumer Advisory Council  
500 Summer Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

To Whom it may Concern:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Oregon Washington health Network (OWhN) of Pendleton concerning House Bill 2831. Our organization is consortium of ten health and social service agencies that serve Morrow, Umatilla, and Union Counties of Oregon. The goal of our organization is to improve the health status of residents in our service area by addressing existing gaps in services and developing new and innovative models of service delivery. We are in strong support of HB 2831. This bill would provide funding to establish peer respite centers in three areas of our state. These centers would provide peer respite services to individuals with mental illnesses and would be patterned after similar services now being successfully implemented in 13 other states nationally.

Our organization is currently implementing a one year opioid planning grant funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration. This project includes development of a regional workforce development plan. We have been collecting data for this plan for the past four months. Among the finding we have made to date is that Northeast Oregon has numerous long standing deficiencies in our behavioral services workforce. Based on HRSA and Oregon Health Authority licensing data, Northeast Oregon has a deficiencies of more than 150 behavioral health professionals. This include 26 psychologists, 58 social workers, and 8 psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners. Based on our work to date using National provider ratios Northeast Oregon was found to have less psychologists than does the state of Mississippi, which was the lowest in the nation in 2016. Added to this problem is a lack of services for those with serious mental illnesses. Based on our data collection, Northeast Oregon has the highest percentage of seriously mentally ill adults in the State of Oregon based on population. Yet we have virtually no specialized services to care for this population.

One of the bright spots of our work to date has been to train peer mentors. To date, we have trained 36 peer mentors and are currently training 16 of these individuals to become certified substance abuse counselors. We are also working with our local emergency rooms to place peer mentors in each facility using evidence based practices. Peer run respite offers a similar opportunity to provide counseling and many other services needed for those individual in mental health crises. Thus, we strongly support HB 2831 and would respectfully ask that this program also be made available in Northeast Oregon. In closing, thank you for this opportunity to demonstrate our support for this long overdue initiative.

Sincerely,

*Dan H. Peterson*

Manager, Oregon Washington health Network

cc: Board of Directors and Members of OWhN