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Governor



Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs

“Advocating Equality and Diversity”

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Senate Committee on Health Care
Testimony in support of SB 721
March 27, 2019 at 1pm, Hearing Room A

Chair Monnes Anderson, Vice-Chair Linthicum, Senators Beyer, Fagan and Knopp,

The Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA) role is to work toward economic, social, political, and legal equity for Oregon’s population. We do this by advising on policy, growing leadership and building success in our communities. OCHA strongly supports SB 721, as this bill will ultimately improve Latino youths’ access to needed services provided by coordinated care organizations. Thank you for this opportunity to support this important, more equitable, and inclusive bill.

For the last 18 months, OCHA has been building on past legislative actions and delving into new culture-informed mental health research, in partnership with DHS and OHA, using Latinos-specific DHS and OHA data, for the Mental Health and Latinos Initiative. This data had never been reviewed or analyzed in its 30-year collection span. OCHA set out to review thousands of data sets with the assistance of graduate-level interns, to create qualitative and quantitative reports that would lead to a slate of recommendations. In addition, we regularly convened meetings with DHS and OHA leadership, and developed a community advisory council comprised of mental health, behavioral health, and chemical dependency professionals and educators from around the state. Several competing data points were revealed:

- 1) The 2017 Latino Mental Health (MH) Study, conducted jointly by the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA), OHA and DHS, showed that of 10,000 Latino individuals accessing MH services over five years statewide, schools are the primary referral point, and that Latino youth accessed therapy at a median age of 17, whereas the total population’s median age to access was 29 years. In addition, youth were referred at higher priority levels of care. Latinos receive services at a significantly younger age and while prioritized as needing services, Latinos do not have many mental health resources or insurance available to them and their families.
- 2) Latino youth, particularly female and LGBTQ+ youth, have a greater incidence of suicidal thinking, gestures and attempted suicides. This is an underreported crisis in our community.
- 3) There are systemic and individual barriers, such as: lack of culturally specific, bi-lingual, bicultural, mental health providers; the community is fearful of obtaining services due to the political climate; there is a lack of integrated mental health care, and there is a lack of acute care services for Latinos. Of greatest concern is the lack of accessibility of well-trained, trauma informed professionals, providers and other types of health workers.

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- 4) A resounding best care recommendation from the Mental Health and Latinos Initiative research was the integrated primary care and mental services model. This model integrates mental health services into community centers, such as school-based health clinics, which decreases some of the stigma of students seeking care, as they are already attending school, not making a separate trip to a clinic elsewhere. Additionally, other platform models were recommended, most of which are geared to service within the community such as other destinations that are part of everyday living, in addition to schools: Community centers, and churches, some with housing centers. HB 4002, addressing chronic absenteeism, launched the Building Resilient Families' Pilot programs such as the school-based trauma-informed model that has improved continuity of care, reduced absenteeism, a 50% decrease in discipline referrals, and graduation rates improved by 47%, while providing mental health and emotional well-being resources to its Latino students.
- 5) In all, the Mental Health and Latinos Initiative community advisory council has stated that there is a need for increased funding and service options for Latinos. Services need to be less compartmentalized and better integrated. There needs to be a better reimbursement model and greater access to general funds. Community is seeking to reduce the stigma of accessing mental health services, and raise awareness regarding the importance of emotional and mental health for Latinos and all communities of color.
- 6) Therein, we are in support of SB 721 to require coordinated care organizations to improve its reimbursement mechanisms for school-based health centers to help improve equity, access and coordinated care.



Linda Castillo, Chair