



AFSCME Urges your support for SB 1552

February 4, 2020

Dear Chair Roblan, Vice Chair Boles and members of the Senate Mental Health Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 1552. Oregon AFSCME represents a growing number of public and private employees in the state including some of our recently organized members in the behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment sectors.

Nationally, there are other locals and councils with similar membership and our legislative staff at AFSCME International in Washington DC have worked with employers and other advocacy organizations here in Oregon and across the country to secure and sustain the federal money sent to Oregon and the other participating states to provide critical health care services to clients of our community behavioral health providers.

This following story was shared with our US House of Representatives Oregon Delegation in June 2019 encouraging the continued funding of the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics program.

At Cascadia Behavioral Health in Portland Oregon, AFSCME Council 75 members who are therapists, care coordinators, crisis counselors, residential counselors, support staff and other workers, deliver whole health care – integrated mental health and addiction services, primary care and housing – through the CCBHC program. These health care workers never stop working to help those who want to get healthy and recover. It is not just a job; it is a calling.

That core commitment to helping people heal is why Alexandra Birch, a Qualified Mental Health Associate, cares deeply about the CCBHC program. It has helped innovate and improve the delivery of care. She was hired in 2017 as a Care Coordinator at Cascadia because of an investment Congress provided to the CCBHC program. In that role she is the glue that connects primary care with behavioral health care and makes sure care is focused on the whole patient.

In her work, Ms. Birch treats clients with anxiety and very high blood pressure but who do not have an established doctor; she is able to connect them to a doctor. She cares for clients on certain anti-depressants that experienced weight gain as a result, which put them at higher risk of developing diabetes. Because of the investment Congress provided in establishing



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CCBHCs, Ms. Birch can direct those clients to in-house primary care to monitor and prevent diabetes.

For practitioners like Ms. Birch, Cascadia's capacity to bring primary care into the outpatient behavioral health care clinics is a game-changer. It enhances their delivery of services and outcomes for their clients. From the frontline perspective, the integration of behavioral health and primary care in a CCBHC removes logistical and other obstacles to consultation between providers. These consultations translate into improved identification of the best route of care for a client with complex physical and mental conditions with the result of getting a client on the road to wellness much quicker.

Cascadia's capacity to sustain and expand this level of high-quality coordinated care to a vulnerable population depends on the dedication and skills of workers like Ms. Birch and congressional action to continue investing in the CCBHC fiscal model that covers 100 percent of costs.

With the fiscal investment in CCBHCs, Congress allows Cascadia staff to reach into the community to expand access to behavioral health services for individuals with serious mental illnesses. Cascadia works with Portland's 24-hour mental health crisis emergency room, Unity Center Behavioral Health. Cascadia staff establish crisis patients with Cascadia primary care providers immediately after Unity hospital care. This enables patients to continue medications that ensure mental stability until they have fully connected with Cascadia's mental health providers.

We know that there are other stories like Alexandra Birch's that have been possible because of state and federal investments in the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics program and many more to come if we pass SB 1552 to invest the \$15 million we need to secure an additional \$62 million in federal funds.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 urges your support and passage of SB 1552.

Thank you for your work on this issue.

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