



3/3/21

To: House Committee on Behavioral Health  
From: Oregon Council for Behavioral Health (OCBH)  
Re: HB 2949 Testimony

Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Moore-Green and Nosse, Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Council for Behavioral Health (OCBH) 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. Our members provide the full continuum of behavioral healthcare from prevention to outpatient and residential treatment for the thousands of Oregonians living with the chronic diseases of addiction and mental illness.

We have welcomed the introduction of several bills this session that seek to address the primary threat to behavioral health access: workforce instability. For our providers, the challenge remains hiring and retaining experienced and qualified employees willing to work in a career with taxing demands. Stagnant rates have severely compromised providers' turnover rates, making it nearly impossible to hire and retain experienced and qualified employees. The result of a destabilized workforce is a reduction in access, and the current workforce crisis means our providers are able to serve fewer people in need of treatment at a time when demand for our services is increasing.

The bold investments of HB 2949 seek to improve this crisis by developing a provider pipeline and by funding critical programming, including transition services for those reintegrating post-incarceration. We hope to expand this conversation to include substance use disorder providers and those delivering co-occurring care.

We also know that the primary driver of our workforce crisis is stagnant reimbursement rates. We cannot uncouple these efforts from providing a livable wage to the entire continuum of providers delivering this care. Additionally, we hope to discuss the following proposals:

- Reducing background check barriers for the peer workforce
- Reciprocity of the licensed behavioral health workforce with other states
- Scholarships to fund registration and certification fees for behavioral health professionals
- Bolstering current efforts underway at Lewis & Clark College to model enhanced access, education, and training for BIPOC students committed to improving access to underserved communities
- Investments in marketing behavioral health workforce opportunities and vacancies

We look forward to working with the sponsors of this bill and fellow stakeholders to build on this bold policy to achieve workforce stabilization across provider and service types

Thank you,

Heather Jefferis, MA  
Executive Director, Oregon Council for Behavioral Health