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To: House Committee on Human Services

From: Irma Jimenez, Interim Division Director of Aging, Disability, and Veterans Services

Date: March 5, 2021

RE: Testimony on HB 2952

Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs Lief and Ruiz, and members of the House Committee On Human Services, I am Irma Jimenez, Interim Division Director from Multnomah County's Department of Human Services, Aging, Disability, and Veterans Services Division. I use she/her/her's pronouns.

I am here today to support House Bill 2952. HB 2952 would appropriate monies from the State General Fund to the Department of Human Services for allocation to area agencies in order to address unmet needs of seniors for behavioral health treatment and to address disproportionate burdens on seniors arising from COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 8, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic Governor Brown issued [Executive Order 20-03](#), in which she made a request of all Oregonians to *Stay Home. Save Lives*. Subsequent executive orders continued to direct, particularly, older adults, to stay home and stay safe. Unfortunately, staying home and staying safe resulted in feelings of isolation, anxiety, depression, and an increase in substance use. Older adults have been isolating for over a year now and with slow vaccine roll out, they still have a number of months ahead of them before social events and access to resources and community increase.

At the same time that Area Agencies on Aging and the aging network were rapidly mobilizing to respond to these impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State general funds that were used to fund the ADRC Mental Health grant were eliminated from the FY 21 budget and have been identified for on-going elimination in the GRB 22-24. In the Metro Area counties alone (Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington and Columbia) this reflects \$322,599 dollars and slots for up to 196 people served by an evidenced based mental health program called PEARLS (Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives).

Area Agencies on Aging have been partnering with Aging and People with Disabilities to provide access for low barrier, evidence based behavioral health programs for many years, we know how to create a system of care for older adult's behavioral healthcare. We have provider networks who have navigated a shift to a telemedicine approach as well as providers who can offer culturally specific care. As Area Agencies, it is our charge to evaluate the needs in our communities and develop plans in partnership with the aging network, community non-profits, and health systems to address the specific behavioral health care needs of older adults.. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ADRC MH cut, and on-going barriers to behavioral health access for older adults illustrates the great need for the funding provided by HB 2952.

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In the best of times access to behavioral health services is challenging for Medicare and dual-eligible beneficiaries due to lack of providers, especially providers who have clinical experience treating older adults. HB 2952 would provide crucial funding to help older adults receive the care they need to make it through this difficult time and long-term effects of untreated behavioral healthcare as well as how to adjust to a post-COVID-19 pandemic.

We at Multnomah County support HB 2952 and ask that you take this important step to ensure our older adults have the behavioral healthcare they need to thrive.

Thank you,

Irma Jimenez  
Interim Director  
Multnomah County Aging, Disability & Veterans Services Division  
Pronouns: she, her, hers