

Testimony
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services APD/DHS Budget Public Hearing (4/13/21)

I'm Dr. Jim Davis representing United Seniors of Oregon, Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens, and the Oregon Consumer League. We are here today in strong support for Oregon's nationally-acclaimed Aging and People with Disabilities/DHS system and to support the reinstatement of the APD preventative behavioral health program.

For 4 decades, Oregon has built a senior and disability service system that is considered a national model for in-home and community-based care, providing the most independent living environment for seniors and persons with disabilities through "continuum of care" options. Community-based care has been a cost-effective investment that helps respond to the physical and emotional problems of seniors and people with disabilities, allowing them to remain in their own communities and live independent lives. It has saved the state hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs related to hospitalization and institutionalization.

We support the Governor's Budget recommendations that maintains important statewide and local APD senior and disabled services at continuing levels. We hope the Legislature will continue to make funding of senior and disability services a top priority.

We primarily seek your assistance on another priority issue for senior and disability advocates, behavioral health. We are asking the Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee to restore back into the 2021-2023 APD/ODHS budget (now being considered by the Subcommittee) the \$1.8 million in APD/DHS senior-disability behavioral health funds eliminated in the Fall 2020 Special Legislative Session. These preventative mental health services are critically needed for seniors and people with disabilities, not to mention that the state no longer faces the financial crisis it was anticipating in the fall of 2020.

Advocates have fought very hard for this limited amount of APD/DHS funding for preventative mental health issues that have been a cost-effective vehicle that helps keep seniors and people with disabilities safer and emotionally healthier within a supportive environment. The program emphasized creative community and facility approaches for behavioral health within the senior and disability communities, including innovative programs such as the HOPE, PEARLS, and Healing Pathways. This funding also provided important information and referral and other health-related services and supports through the local Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs).

With the senior and disability communities so severely hit by Covid-19, the emotional needs of these populations couldn't be more important. We think it unconscionable to totally eliminate APD-DHS funding for preventative approaches to reach the ever-increasing numbers of seniors and people with disabilities at high risk of developing behavioral health difficulties such as depression and anxiety, often exacerbated by the effects of complex medical problems, multiple medications and the use and abuse of alcohol and prescription medications. The public and private mental health systems have ignored the special mental health and addiction needs of the senior and disability communities, with even greater hurdles experienced by older BIPOC populations.

We have wide-ranging support from the senior and disability communities for restoring the APD behavioral health funding, including: Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens; United Seniors; Oregon Consumer League; Human Services Coalition of Oregon; Association of Oregon Centers for Independent Living; and the Oregon Health Care Association.

We urge you to support the maintenance and expansion of Aging and People with Disabilities/DHS services and the restoration of the APD/DHS senior-disability preventative behavioral health program.