

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2952
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House Committee on Human Service
John D. Curtis
14370 Hwy 62
Eagle Point, OR 97524

Good afternoon Chair Williams, Vice Chairs Leif and Ruiz, and members of the committee. My name is John Curtis. I am a disabled senior living in rural southern Oregon.

My support of this bill is due to my familiarity with Area Agencies on Aging and the Behavioral Health programs they administer. Most often the calls to AAAs from seniors or from the people who care for/about them far outnumber their BH capacity.

Our triple A was recently lucky enough to be awarded some COVID-19 funding for its senior BH programs. After a short announcement on the radio station the phones lit up with hundreds of requests for help. Unfortunately it had to decline most callers due to its limited professional staff.

It is worth noting that alternative resources for seniors' mental health are frequently difficult to find. This is extremely so in rural or frontier Oregon. Medicare does not reimburse the vast majority of mental health professionals. And county BH managers' programs are similarly strapped to provide services to seniors unless they are in crisis.

During this pandemic, seniors have become even more anxious, stressed and/or depressed. Mustering the courage to call the local AAA's Aging and Disability Resources for help with one's mental health takes guts. For those few brave enough to make that call it is very hard to think about the consequences after the "I'm sorry, but . . ." Without professional help the liquor store or medicine cabinet are often the remaining options open to them. And that only hastens the tragic spiral downwards.

I urge you to support HB 2952.