

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2952
February 15, 2021
House Committee on Human Services
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February 16, 2021

Good morning Chair Williams, Vice Chairs Leif and Ruiz, and members of the committee. My name is Erika Bekermeier. I am a retired Marriage Family Therapist living in rural southern Oregon.

During my retirement, I have continued tracking the need vs. availability of mental health services for seniors and the disabled in rural Oregon. I am familiar with the services provided by AAAs and other mental health services in Jackson county. Statistics show that the need for services continues to increase while the availability continues to decrease to the point of crisis proportions. Meaning, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic, are not only exacerbated, but skyrocketing. Again, statistics prove this point.

Consequently, we also see this population self-medicating with drugs and alcohol to substitute for mental health treatment, and thereby create substance abuse disorders and/or opioid addiction. In addition, Medicare spending on related hospital stays for injuries and addiction treatment is in the billions, again per statistics.

Hope is on the horizon for seniors and disabled with House Bill 2952 which states **“... to address the unmet needs of seniors for mental and behavioral health treatment and to address the disproportionate burdens on seniors arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.”**

Please support HB 2952

Respectfully,
Erika Bekermeier