

February 7, 2022

Rep. Paul Holvey, Chair  
Committee Members  
House Committee on Business and Labor  
State Capitol  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Provider Opposition to HB 4126

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Bonham and Grayber, Members of the Committee,

We write you on behalf of behavioral health providers and the broader set of nonprofits that support community wellness in Oregon. Our care teams are on the front lines of the crisis of unaddressed mental illness and addiction in communities across the state.

The need for these services has outpaced our ability to provide care and our workforce has faced the brunt of the state's historic underfunding of behavioral health. The pandemic has only exacerbated a pre-existing crisis. Last week, the Oregon Health Authority reported the closure of 383 residential behavioral health beds as of December of 2021 – nearly all due to an inability to staff the beds safely. The delivery system has never been more fragile than it is today.

Although we believe HB 4126 was introduced in an effort to support these workers, as currently drafted the provisions and definitions are very hard to interpret, are legally concerning, and appear to differ from the stated intent. As a result, it is difficult to understand the extent of the bill and its potential impact on an already fragile sector. We struggle to comprehend the justification for introducing a new, complex labor relations concept during a 35-day legislative session that focuses exclusively on our most unstable sector, especially one nearly entirely dependent on state Medicaid rates.

We believe solutions to challenges within the behavioral health system are best developed and most effective when the wide range of stakeholders engage in a deliberative and collaborative process. Behavioral health providers and advocates weren't given an opportunity to review the concept prior to its public introduction. As a result, we ask the committee to forgo consideration of HB 4126 this session in favor of a more inclusive process during the interim.

You have likely heard from frontline behavioral health professionals about their challenges working in the behavioral health sector. The work of serving our most vulnerable Oregonians has been carried by professionals who've been compensated too little for too long, saddled with high caseloads, and asked to care for patients whose healthcare concerns are complex. We agree. We've come to this legislature to express these same concerns and to support the work of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services to seek ways to reduce unnecessary and redundant administrative burdens on behavioral health providers and to make a direct and substantial investment in the behavioral health workforce.

*\*\*For more information, please contact Cassie Bruske, Eames Consulting, at [cassie@eames.consulting](mailto:cassie@eames.consulting)*

HB 4126 comes at the most precarious time in our behavioral health sector – please don't pass this new, potentially far-reaching concept in a short session. Allow us the interim to take the necessary time to vet a proposal that impacts this fragile sector.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



\*\*For more information, please contact Cassie Bruske, Eames Consulting, at [cassie@eames.consulting](mailto:cassie@eames.consulting)