



To: House Behavioral Health and Health Care committee
From: APANO, PCUN, and Family Forward's Mental Health Coalition
Date: February 1, 2023
RE: In Support of HB 2977 and HB 2651

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and members of the committee:

My name is Lisa Kwon and I am the Policy Manager at Family Forward Oregon where we fight for economic and reproductive justice for all mothers and caregivers. Today I am here representing a mental health coalition led by APANO, PCUN, and Family Forward. Over the past two years, we have worked to create a grassroots campaign that envisions a robust mental health system that is equitable, affordable, culturally responsive, and community driven. This includes, but is not limited to, supporting BIPOC providers and access to non-traditional treatment and care, while ensuring the entire workforce is compensated and resourced at a level that recognizes the critical work they do.

During the 2021 legislation session, our coalition supported HB 2949 which created a Behavioral Health Workforce Incentive (BHWi) program to increase the recruitment and retention of people of color, tribal members, and residents of rural areas that provide culturally responsive care. This session, we strongly support both HB 2977 and HB 2651, which continues to fund and expand the BHWi program. HB 2977 in particular, makes additional improvements to the implementation of the BHWi program that HB 2949 did not address. We support two provisions in HB 2977 in particular:

First, we support the requirement to collect and report data regarding incentive applicants and awardees. Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) in Oregon struggle to find care that is offered by BIPOC providers, especially care that is culturally responsive. Oregon is consistently ranked one of the worst states in the country¹ when it comes to access to mental health care and fewer than one-in-five² mental health care providers in the state are people of color. The original intent of HB 2949 was to support the recruitment and retention of providers of color in the workforce, in order to better address Oregonian's desperate need for culturally responsive mental health care. We believe that intentional data collection of incentive awardees is necessary in order to inform the Oregon Health Authority on their outreach strategy and to help identify the gaps in outreach.

¹ <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/ranking-states>

² <https://www.wweek.com/news/2020/09/23/black-mental-health-care-providers-are-greatly-underrepresented-in-oregon/>



In addition, we support the requirement to establish an oversight council under the Oregon Health Authority to ensure that impacted individuals are leading the work and identifying important systemic barriers. In 2021, OHA initially formed an oversight council of behavioral health providers and leaders in the workforce to help guide the implementation of HB 2949 even though it wasn't required in statute. I participated in this council representing our coalition, however, the council failed to remain consistent due to OHA's competing priorities in moving the BHWi program forward. We believe that the implementation of BHWi could have been more equitable and community-led if voices from the council had been heard throughout the entire process.

Lastly, we strongly support Section 3 in HB 2651 which dedicates \$1M to OHA to conduct outreach to counties, behavioral health providers, educational institutions, and other communities about the BHWi program. We look forward to working with OHA to ensure that BIPOC and other providers that are underrepresented in the behavioral health workforce are aware of and able to access these critical benefits.

The lack of access to comprehensive, sufficient, affordable, and culturally competent mental health care is glaringly obvious for BIPOC communities, caregivers, mothers, immigrants, and refugees. While we work to address better mental health accessibility for our communities, we must also continue to invest in Oregon's behavioral health workforce.

We strongly urge you to support both HB 2977 and HB 2651.

Lisa Kwon
Policy Manager
Family Forward Oregon