

Chair Nosse, vice-chairs Goodwin and Nelson, for the record my name is Janelle Bynum, and I am the State Representative for House District 39. I am testifying today in support of HB 2651 because this legislation will provide the resources Oregon desperately needs to build and strengthen our state's behavioral health workforce.

In 2021 I chief sponsored House Bill 2949 to create the Oregon Behavioral Health Incentive Subaccount with the goal of bringing more providers into Oregon's behavioral health workforce. When this legislation was passed, it was with an understanding that the initial allocation of funds was just a down payment to make up for some of the damage the COVID-19 pandemic had on our state's behavioral health system.

The Incentive Subaccount received an initial allocation of \$80 million in federal ARPA funding, with \$60 million going to workforce incentives including but not limited to housing assistance, sign on and retention bonuses, professional development, and childcare subsidies.

These incentives proved effective, but the original allocation from ARPA is now gone. To keep the ground we have made, and get to where we still need to go, we must continue to fund the work we started in earnest two years ago.

One workforce incentive that highlights the high demand for these benefits is the loan forgiveness program. While only \$15.5 million was made available to assist providers through this benefit, applications for the loan forgiveness program totaled over \$78 million.¹ For those who received loan forgiveness assistance, the majority being persons from marginalized communities, the impacts were life changing. The requirement that loan repayment awardees work in the behavioral health space for at least two years incentivizes these providers to remain in Oregon's behavioral health workforce.

The high demand for the benefits offered under this program underscores the ongoing need that we must address. To meet our goals, we must remain a competitive employer, and funding the Incentive Subaccount is one step in the right direction. We have many talented and motivated providers in our state; and we must meet their dedication and give them the necessary resources for them to do their work.

Please join me in supporting HB 2651. Our behavioral health care workers need this, our constituents need this, and we as legislators we need this to stay true to our word that behavioral health care is a top priority this session.

¹ Behavioral Health Workforce Investments Update (HB 2949), Oregon Health Authority, (January 30, 2023) <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/259398>