



February 21, 2023

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

I am writing on behalf of Oregon Council for Behavioral Health. OCBH is the statewide association of primarily nonprofit providers that deliver treatment for substance use disorders and mental illness. Our member organizations serve individuals living with the chronic diseases of addiction and mental illness. It is likely the behavioral health providers in your districts are members of OCBH.

We write you to provide additional context around HB 2537. The bill before you is the result of problem faced by our hospitals today: managing and paying for the care of individuals boarding in their emergency departments. While this problem needs to be addressed, it is important to note this issue is a symptom of a larger problem: too little access to behavioral health treatment.

Many of the folks boarding in hospitals would be better served in a community-based residential treatment facility, or, in some cases, at the Oregon State Hospital. However, as you well know the waitlists for these levels of treatment are prohibitively long.

While this bill requires immediate attention, we could prevent this from continuing to be an issue by taking two simple steps to increase access to behavioral health treatment: invest in residential behavioral health facilities and provide regular rate adjustments to behavioral health providers. These steps would resource providers appropriately to expand access and retain the staff necessary to deliver care.

If treatment capacity was adequate, we would be able to serve the folks currently awaiting behavioral health treatment in hospital beds in our treatment facilities, preserving hospital capacity for the much-needed emergencies they're designed for – not for long term boarding.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to working with you to address these immediate challenges and provide long term solutions for Oregonians in need of behavioral health support.

Heather Jefferis, MA
Executive Director
Oregon Council for Behavioral Health