

March 7, 2023

To Chair Nosse and Members of the House Committee of Behavioral Health and Health Care:

I am writing this letter in support of HB 2455. I am a group practice co-owner; my partner and I employ five mental health therapists. Our mission is to serve Oregonians through quality, accessible mental health care. We currently serve around 200 Oregonians both in the Portland Metro area, and throughout the state via telehealth.

The current reality of insurance audits is one that has unfortunately presented barriers to providing access to care for as many Oregonians as we would like.

As a young, two year old company, a large part of our business growth has been consumed by seeking out audit preparedness information and doing our best to mitigate the risk of being unprepared for an audit and potentially catastrophic financial recoupments. This takes away time from us as business owners seeing more clients, and also impacts our ability to gain and/or maintain contracts with certain insurers. Information about audit preparedness is difficult to access, unreliable, and unclear. Insurance companies, to date, have not often made audit prep materials or training readily available. Much of the information I have gained has come from my peers, many of whom have learned through incredibly difficult and financially devastating audit experiences. I would like to share a few examples to illustrate how the current system is impacting us as providers, and ultimately impacting Oregonians seeking mental health care.

1. In 2022, I sought out audit preparedness information from a CCO with whom we hold a contract. They were able to provide a newly developed training, but unfortunately the information was vague and incomplete, and staff were unable to answer many of my questions. For instance, I was provided with documentation examples of various forms of clinical documentation that passed audits, but when I requested clarification about what elements of the documentation met audit standards and what elements were simply stylistic differences, they were unable to answer my questions. They also informed me that our practice would be audited according to the 309 set of OARs despite not holding a COA. After multiple contacts with OHA, I provided the CCO verification that this is inaccurate; they then stated they would train their auditors accordingly.
2. Another CCO with whom we are contracted has not been able to provide the audit preparedness training I requested and has not responded to follow up requests in the 5 months since that time (starting October 2022).
3. In 2022, I contacted a private insurance company that serves many of Oregon's medical providers to inquire about contracting. I asked about policies on using 53+ minute therapy sessions (CPT code 90837), as I was aware that previously they held a specific policy prohibiting use of that code unless under certain circumstances, for certain diagnoses. The provider representative informed me that there is no policy on code use. I independently searched for the policy and found it, still listed as active on their website.

Upon further questioning, the representative confirmed that the policy is still active. This means that if audited, we risk financial recoupment for any hour long therapy session not meeting the specific circumstances listed in their policy. After this exchange, we chose to not contract with them due to the lack of transparency in their own policies and standards that put us, and ultimately clients, at risk.

Aside from the time spent seeking out and vetting this information, there is also an impact on our therapists. Due to the unclear and frequently changing nature of the information, our therapists are often having to adapt and change their documentation to meet these standards as we uncover new information. This is not only tiresome, but contributes to burnout in an already demanding profession, and takes away from focus on serving Oregonians in need of mental health care. In a world where audit preparedness standards are clear and easy to access, we are able to better equip therapists in meeting these standards and support them in maintaining the majority of their focus on clinical work and their clients, where it belongs.

In summary, I support HB 2455 and request your support in passing this bill to equip mental health providers to better serve Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Julia Bryson, LCSW
Roots Therapy NW LLC