



March 8, 2023

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share Oregon AFSCME's Support for HB 2235 and the -1 amendments.

Oregon AFSCME represents a growing number of members working in behavioral and mental health and substance use services and treatment. They work in county mental health programs, the Oregon State Hospital, OHSU, and at non-profit providers around the state.

For a bit of history, in 2017, Oregon AFSCME and the Solidarity Alliance of Social Services published our United We Heal report, which highlighted many of the issues that were all contributing to workforce burnout and turnover. We've been collectively working to address many of these including and not limited to, the need of the places for treatment, pay for providers, accessible and affordable workforce development. One piece of the systemic puzzle that has yet to be discussed are caseloads and workloads. Too often, our budgeting processes pit adequate pay for workers against sustainable workloads when in reality they are both critical in providing quality care and services, especially our most vulnerable members of our community.

As Representative Sanchez wound down the workgroup on Behavioral Health Licensing last May, she opened up the conversation to broader questions and issues that the members of the group hoped to address. She asked about what would be ideal and what would it take to get there.

HB 2235 -1 and the aspirational numbers provided are Oregon AFSCME's response to those questions. And because we can't answer them all by ourselves we provided this as a starting point for a conversation of "how would we do this, if we could"

HB 2235-1:

- Considers the current landscape of behavioral health



- We already have a lack of access due to the historical underfunding of community behavioral services and the low pay and high caseloads have led to high turnover or keep people from entering the work.
  - We know we greatly lack the workforce needed to be able to implement standards immediately or in the near future
  - We are just beginning to see the impact of recent rate increases and investments in BH on workforce - we know that paying appropriate wages is one part of providing stability
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- It is not an immediate implementation of a statewide caseload standard, it sets up the conversation and
    - It is meant to be inclusive of management and non management workforce from around the state -frontier, rural and urban - and providers of culturally specific services.
    - It is meant to be inclusive of children's and adult services.
    - It should also be inclusive of consumer advocates and I only realized moments ago that they are not included and apologize for this omission. We will need to include them in any further amendments.
    - It is meant to be inclusive of different models of care across the state, including individual-based and team-based models. (See references to "wrap around care" in the -1 amendment)
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- While the numbers for caseload sizes are aspirational, they are meant to focus the discussion on the question of what would we need for investments and workforce to achieve this level of care for a highly vulnerable population and not have oppressive waitlists.
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- The answers the workgroup brings back to future versions of your committee should ensure that we are keeping caseloads and workloads top of mind when budgeting so that it is part of the equation for providing access to quality behavioral health care. It is important to have case of standards in order to decrease burn out, decrease high staff turnover rates, and thus increasing



access for all Oregonians, including those that may be court managed do so, actually decreasing current legal battles and the behavioral health space.

Why a legislatively created workgroup? It gives all involved a direct timeline and goals, and keeps consistency in the conversation in our constantly shifting world of elected and citizen participation.

I welcome feedback on the concept and look forward to working with you all and our advocacy partners on amendments to ensure we can be successful in this work. I welcome any questions.

In Unity,

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