



March 14, 2023

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

My name is Sarah Lenhart, MA, LPC, NCC and I am the founder and the Clinical Director of Selah Counseling & Wellness located in Springfield, OR and expanding to Junction City, OR in April 2023. I have been a therapist for eleven years and began Selah Counseling & Wellness, a group practice that employs ten clinicians, with the goal to expand in additional communities to increase access to care, particularly to underserved populations. Last year we served hundreds of clients and are continued to expand this number as we grow in staffing and locations.

As a newer practice owner, I ask you to please pass HB2455 to ensure continued care for our clients and the ability to continue to grow to support our communities in their mental health needs. I fully support this bill in efforts to increase Oregonians access to mental health care by supporting our providers' ability to accept insurance without fear.

The ability to accept insurance is critical for our community to access mental health care, with less than 0.5% of our clients engaging in cash pay services. Selah Counseling & Wellness accepts both private and public health insurance and during the past two years of practice, we have experienced considerable stress and anxiety related to the financial liability, inconsistent and unclear expectations set by insurers, and the punitive and hostile audits taking place in our community. I literally think of audits daily, have lost hours of sleep and life worried about the risk of an audit and spend countless hours each month striving to be in compliance and to teach my staff to conduct their services in the most compliance oriented manner.

As I have multiple personal and professional relationships with colleagues that have undergone audits with very negative effects including loss of staff, closing or downsizing of businesses and the need to take legal action, I have seriously considered dropping insurance contracts, resulting in limited care to clients, due to the associated risks. Operating a mental health agency is both a rewarding and incredibly taxing job, with significant stress due to the ambiguous nature of how audits are conducted and the



incredibly daunting financial burdens required for services already rendered and delivered. The risk to agency owners to be forced to reimburse for services delivered in good faith is considerable and limits care, with many agencies only accepting private insurance or cash-pay clinics, to limit or avoid risk.

When mental health practices sign contracts with insurance, there are ambiguous guidelines for how to remain compliant in regards to our business practices, procedures and documentation. When an audit occurs, our operations and documentation are reviewed for compliance to insurance companies rules and policies, many of which are unknown to providers, not easily accessible and at times, even unknown to the insurers employees who multiple times have provided conflicting feedback and guidance. We strive to do our best to be prepared and seek clarity around concerns and issues that have come up in peer's audits, with inconsistent feedback from the plans we contract with.

As the founder and Clinical Director of Selah Counseling & Wellness, I commit hours of my work week reviewing documentation, seeking clarity from provider representatives and consulting with peers on strategies to best protect our business, our employees, and our clients. Selah Counseling & Wellness has conducted a proactive audit with a compliance company to aid in increasing our knowledge and to remedy errors proactively. We are willing to follow the rules and policies required by insurance plans and need them to clear, consistent, concrete and transparent.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sarah Lenhart, MA, LPC, NCC  
Clinical Director  
Selah Counseling & Wellness