



April 8, 2023

Members of the Joint Committee On Ways & Means  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: In support of SB 5506 – Oregon State Budget Investments in Behavioral Health & Housing  
And SB 606 Nonprofit Modernization Act

Chair Steiner, Chair Sanchez, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ashley Clark. I am an Assistant Program Manager at the non-profit behavioral mental health agency, New Narrative.

Our nonprofit provides a range of services to adults seeking mental health care within Multnomah and Washington Counties. Many of our participants experience chronic homelessness or frequent hospitalization. New Narrative provides clinical support, peer support, and housing in an integrative model, with the shared vision that each participant lives a fulfilling life.

I am testifying here today to urge you to support additional funding resources for behavioral health and housing priorities, in support of the Nonprofit Modernization Act (SB606), and to support a Capital Construction request to provide technical assistance for mission-based property management within Oregon's affordable housing programs.

Housing and mental wellness are community concerns. Behavioral mental health agencies provide the support needed for members of our community, if and when they need it. Unfortunately, there are often gaps in funding the basic needs of our participants through sources such as Medicaid, leaving our nonprofits constantly trying to raise additional funds. This negatively impacts our ability to do the work the community desperately needs us to do.

Terms such as "competitive grants" sound good, until you realize how inequitable it makes trying to serve our most vulnerable populations. Many of our nonprofits, particularly smaller nonprofits, are already stretched thin, and we add an additional administrative burden under a competitive funding model when we are trying to provide basic services. I urge you to pass SB 606, the Nonprofit Modernization Act.

One of New Narrative's behavioral health clinics loses hundreds of thousands of dollars per year due to case rates that don't cover the cost to serve participants with the most severe needs, leaving us constantly pleading for grants and trying to raise additional funds to fill the gaps. It can be a losing battle. We must find ways to transform how we fund this work.



I grew up in Oregon, and in 2019 I developed an autoimmune disease with complications that left me houseless due to medical debt. I was still houseless when I started working at New Narrative. I only recently signed a lease in my own name. Many of my colleagues also share lived experiences with the participants we serve. We work long hours, often at low wages, because we know just how vital our work is. I ask you to help provide living wages for our behavioral health workers.

Just a few days ago, New Narrative opened a new 15-unit apartment building with permanent supportive housing that will include wrap-around supports and mission-based property management for the tenants. This type of successful and innovative, "community hub" style program is only possible due to the funding we receive from the Legislature through the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Housing & Community Services. Your investments are making a difference.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify, and to have my voice heard. I, along with my colleagues here today, urge you to support resources that will allow us to help our participants thrive, not just survive.

Sincerely,

Ashleigh Clark