



April 8, 2023

Co-Chairs Sanchez and Steiner and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Hello, my name is Anthony Foster, I am a shop steward for AFSCME Local 1790 which represents the employees of Cascadia Healthcare where I work as a Behavioral Health Counselor and Case Manager for formerly homeless individuals who now receive a permanent housing grant.

I appreciate the investments and other work over the last few years to improve Oregon's Behavioral and Mental Health Services. I can see the impact of this work in a variety of ways and I want to inform you that we still need *\$1.2 billion to continue the investments made 2022 in several areas.*

In 2022 HB 4004 was a great first step in bringing the wages of community mental health workers closer to appropriate for the work we do. Unfortunately, despite 30% increase in reimbursement rates across the board for billable medicaid services my base salary as a QMHP went up 9% and some of my colleagues who were QMHAs where I was working at the time did not receive a raise.

At Cascadia, employees were told in October that the grant was going to be used to bring employee pay up to median market rate salary, and they hired a consultant to bring salaries up to median for the position and area they are in. Like many other employers who got grant money from HB 4004 Cascadia also gave people one time bonuses.

The current market rate is not enough. Cascadia and other employers still don't pay enough to find quality workers and a one time bonus does little to change that. I can understand while people are hesitant to apply, as in community mental health, even the jobs that require master's degrees bare little hope of making it to the middle class.

The grant I work on has had at least three open positions on it since I started at Cascadia in December, when I was referred to as a unicorn at a holiday office party. We can't spend all of the money in our permanent housing grant and get more people off the street because we don't have enough staff members to get more people off the street with our grant money from HUD.

I know that the funding needs are great and that you will also hear bills that are inclusive or additions to these investments. I would note that behavioral health impacts many other service areas and programs across the state and investments here will help people with housing



stability, and reduce the burden on public safety services that have become the improper default services for people in crisis.

Please support these investments to provide the best quality and consistent care possible, by funding \$45.9 million for a COLA on the provider rates and please make sure funds are directed to raise market wages.

Thank you.