

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, Members of the Committee,

I would like to express my support of House Bill 3610 on behalf of Oregon Council for Behavioral Health. OCBH is the statewide association of providers that serve individuals living with the chronic diseases of addiction and mental illness. It is likely the behavioral health providers in your districts are members of OCBH.

Our members have been at the table for decades as Oregon has attempted to tackle addiction in all forms – from the meth crisis to rising opioid overdose rates. Throughout these efforts, a quiet yet overwhelming reality has gone unaddressed: the majority of Oregon’s addiction crisis is addiction to alcohol.

The startling data about the costs of untreated alcohol addiction occur both in our healthcare systems and personal costs to Oregonians and their families that come in the form of cancer treatments, criminal justice interventions, and increased utilization of our child welfare system.

We believe HB 3610 would provide a much-needed opportunity to determine how to balance the economic value of Oregon’s alcohol industry with the public health costs. We hope this table will allow us to better understand the scope of alcohol addiction and explore strategies to address it together. For OCBH, this also means including the voices of culturally specific providers and consumers. We can’t do this work without the input of individuals with lived experience.

In discussions around alcohol pricing a common question arises: are we spending enough on behavioral health? With recent investments, are sufficient resources already being invested? These questions bring to light the lack of parity between how we understand physical health and how we’re beginning to understand behavioral health. As a community we don’t ask these questions of diabetes care, of arthritis treatment, or of cancer because we know failing to treat these health conditions is more costly both in economic and societal costs. But the questions minimize both our recent gains and our historic burden of failing to address chronic behavioral health conditions, like alcohol addiction, for too long. We urge your support to build on your success in changing this history and creating new opportunities to actuate the outcomes we all desire for health.

Thank you for your support of this opportunity to explore needed interventions.

Heather Jefferis, MA
Executive Director
Oregon Council for Behavioral Health