



April 21, 2023

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Members of the Committee,

My name is Chris Wig, and I serve as Executive Director of Emergence Addiction and Behavioral Therapies. Emergence is a non-profit, state-licensed agency that provides treatment for substance use, mental health, and disordered gambling in Lane and Linn Counties.

I am here today on behalf of Emergence and the Oregon Council of Behavioral Health (OCBH)—the statewide organization of substance use disorder and mental health treatment providers—to discuss the critical investments in behavioral health proposed in the 2023 Legislative Session.

I feel grateful to the Legislature—including my mentor and dear friend Sen. Lee Beyer, who has since retired—for prioritizing investments in behavioral health over the past two long sessions. Based on my personal conversations with legislators who represent Lane County, I know your commitment to this work is due to seeing firsthand in your communities what happens when our neighbors do not have access to treatment. From increasing rates of suicide among youth to a record number of overdoses, it is clear we still have much work to do.

When contemplating the budget for this biennium, we ask you to consider the many ways expanding access to behavioral health treatment may resolve some of the most challenging policy issues faced by the legislature, for example:

- We know one of the most expensive diagnoses for our neighbors who receive health coverage from the Oregon Health Plan is Opioid Use Disorder because of unaddressed co-occurring health conditions.
- We know our acute care hospital partners are rightfully concerned about the number of folks in behavioral health crisis boarding in emergency departments.
- We know the Oregon Health Authority is spending a disproportionate amount of their time tackling issues related to the capacity crisis in the Oregon State Hospital, taking their eye off the ball while our substance use disorder treatment system collapses.

These are broad and complicated challenges, but they are linked by one simple solution—more access to behavioral health treatment.

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This session, you have the opportunity to make progress toward ending these decades-long challenges by providing funding to meet the capacity of services our neighbors—and your constituents—need to grow and thrive. You can do this by funding the following requests:

- Investing in our behavioral health workforce by supporting a cost-of-living adjustment for behavioral health reimbursement rates to prevent the stagnation that got us here in the first place.
- Funding at least 300 Residential beds for people experiencing Substance Use Disorders and at least 282 beds for Mental Health Residential.
- Funding 943 supported housing, single-room occupancy (SRO), and Shelter beds.
- You could do this by leveraging enhanced federal funds through expanding the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) model proposed in Senate Bill 624.

These solutions are not inexpensive. These proposed investments total more than \$600 million and are detailed in written testimony from OCBH and our community partners. However, we ask you to weigh the expense against the possibility that doing nothing may be even more costly—both in dollars and in the lives of our fellow Oregonians.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I appreciate your hard work, and the work of your staff, to represent us in Salem and conduct the People's business.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Wig
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