

SB 1557 Testimony

I would like to offer support for this legislation which is long overdue. In 2013, when Oregon adopted the Community First Choice Option or k plan for its Aging and People with Disability and Developmental Disability services systems, it was also supposed to implement provisions within the Behavioral Health system. Many people who experience mental and emotional disabilities need long term supports for them to have full lives in the community.

Only the Office of Developmental Disability Services implemented k plan services for children in Oregon. It has been a tremendous resource for the health and well-being of children and families who experience developmental disabilities. The best way to remove silos in our systems would be for DD, APD, and BH to have the same Medicaid authority under the k plan to provide the same array of supports people need in all three systems. Adopting k plan is the best thing the DD system has done to further systemic equity and it is needed in other systems as well.

We will never be able to treat our way out of our mental health crisis. We need to build stronger, healthier, and more supportive communities. Behavioral Health and Aging and People with Disabilities need to build the capacity to serve people throughout the lifespan, and especially children, with the supports they need to be full participants in their communities. People with mental, emotional, physical, and medical disabilities deserve the same long term supports that the state offers people with developmental disabilities.

If the three systems can build more robust supports with a more shared foundation, they can better serve people who experience intersections of these disabilities. It is important that each of the systems develop the capacity to support the needs of people they serve and collaborate when people need supports across systems as part of their core infrastructure not as an add on or outside contract.

Physical and mental health is significantly impacted by stress. People with mental health challenges can be significantly impacted by physical health challenges. People with physical health challenges can be significantly impacted by mental health challenges. Supports that reduce the stress of daily living can be very therapeutic for physical and mental health without being treatment or therapy. People who are well supported in other areas of their lives are better positioned to benefit from mental health therapy and treatment. Children in the behavioral health system need access to a full spectrum of support.

Since this is already an allowable option that has not been implemented, attention to full and appropriate implementation will be important. This is an opportunity for our Medicaid systems to significantly invest in prevention and well-being to forestall bigger investments with worse outcomes in crisis and institutional care.

This legislation aligns with all three of the governor's top priorities in that the services in this bill promote better behavioral health services, early childhood support, and access to housing. I hope Oregon will make the most of this opportunity to support our children and families.

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