

Testimony- SB 1592- 2/6/24

Greetings my fellow Legislators! Thank you for being here today! I see that this bill has a fiscal impact- so most likely won't make it to the House side, but travel to W/M- so I am reaching out with a few questions ahead of time. I am all for supporting more Mental Health providers but my question is- what is the data behind the support? How many more mental health workers are we going to be exporting with this funding? Also- I think the Portland Public School is the only school in the state that has a Social Workers program??? I am curious why we wouldn't look at expanding that to other schools of higher education? The other concern- I received an email a few weeks back from a person asking about our State Board of Social Workers. Please see below for email-

I trust this message finds you in good health. I am writing to draw your attention to the alarming delays in processing applications at the Oregon Board of Licensed Social Workers. The purpose of this correspondence is to convey my deep concerns and frustration regarding the prolonged application processing times and to stress the critical importance of expeditious licensure for behavioral health professionals in Oregon.

Currently, I am in the process of registering as a Clinical Social Work Associate through the Oregon Board of Licensed Social Workers. However, I am unable to commence my journey towards accumulating the required 3500 clinical hours until I am assigned a number that permits me to work as a CSWA. Despite numerous attempts to contact the Board via phone, I have consistently encountered a full voicemail box. Additionally, I have sent multiple emails seeking information about the timeline for processing my application and how I can assist in expediting the process.

Regrettably, my efforts have yielded limited responses, with only two emails acknowledging my inquiries. To my dismay, I was informed in one of these emails that my application was not processed until January 9th, 2024, despite submitting it two and a half months ago. This delay is not only perplexing but also disheartening. During a recent call, I spoke with Angela Goodpaster-Hicks, who disclosed that they are currently processing applications from October 2023. Such delays are unacceptable, given the pressing mental health and addiction crisis affecting our community, with lives hanging in the balance.

I am profoundly frustrated and concerned, as these delays directly impact the lives of individuals in need. We are talking about people's lives, and the prolonged wait times for seeking and receiving help severely exacerbate the crisis. Moreover, this delay affects the broader availability of mental health services in Oregon.

Upon reviewing the Oregon Board of Licensed Social Workers' website, I noted that there are only five individuals employed within the agency. It raises questions as to why such a critical state licensing board has such a limited workforce. If the issue is attributed to funding

constraints, urgent measures must be taken to allocate additional resources to hire more staff. It is simply unacceptable that our state is facing a behavioral health crisis while relying on such a small team to license social workers.

My firsthand experience with the application process has shed light on the formidable challenges behavioral health professionals encounter when seeking licensure in Oregon. This delay has not only caused personal frustration but has also resulted in missed opportunities for me to contribute to clinical roles in Oregon.

Recently, I attended the 2024 Measure 110 Research Symposium, where the shortage of workers providing services for those in need emerged as a significant concern. Oregon is grappling with a fentanyl crisis, leading to tragic fatalities on our streets. Unfortunately, individuals seeking help often endure extended wait times due to the inadequate availability of detox beds, treatment facilities, and qualified addiction and mental health professionals.

I implore you to take immediate action to address these critical issues at the Oregon Board of Licensed Social Workers. Lives are at stake, and we cannot afford further delays. Timely licensure for behavioral health professionals is essential to combat the ongoing crisis and ensure the well-being of our community.

I eagerly await your response and am willing to provide any assistance necessary to expedite the resolution of these pressing concerns. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Belindy Bonser

I just share this with you because IF we are going to give \$6m dollars to Universities to increase our mental health capabilities, how are we going to measure this output?

Thank you all for serving your state! I look forward to discussing this matter further with you!
Many Blessings! Emily