



Date: 02/12/2024

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, Members of the Committee

My name is Pauline Gichohi, Behavioral Health Division Manager, Lane County BH. I have been in the public BH sector for a couple decades now and continue to be alarmed at the dwindling workforce, at a time when BH services are at an all-time high.

I would like to express strong support for the -1 amendment to HB 4071 to convene a task force with the ultimate goal of promptly licensing new health professionals and health professionals who move from other states to Oregon. I am also in support of the -2 and -3 amendments to participate in the Social Work Licensure Interstate Compact and the Counseling Interstate Compact in order to improve public access to social work and counseling services.

I am sure there are a myriad of reasons why workforce is what it is today, and I believe these are necessary steps to help us determine potential challenges in recruiting and enticing professionals in Oregon.

In Lane County for example, we have currently 8 Master level clinician (QMHP) positions open. This has been consistent for several years now. Six of these positions have been open for at least six months.

We are also expanding services as required by the State for mobile and other crisis BH services across the county. These positions are now posted, with no takers at the QMHP level. With a total of 14 QMHP vacancies, we are limited in terms of services we can provide, and it impacts access to critical BH services, for the most vulnerable in our community. This also impacts current clinicians, as caseloads are quite high. Burn out and retention is a constant challenge. We are constantly hiring, a practice that is time consuming and expensive.

This bill is a step in the right direction to improve the number of QMHPs in the behavioral health system, which in turn improves access to care. I also hope the taskforce will identify recommendations that can be pursued in the 2025 session, to include the possibility of temporary licensure, for clinicians moving to Oregon. I urge your support of HB 4071 and the amendments.

Sincerely,  
Pauline Gichohi