

**February 5, 2025**

**Erin Davis**  
erindavis@hazel.co

**Testimony in Support of Increased Access to Mental Health Services for Oregon Students**

**To Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson, McIntire and Members of the House Education Committee,**

I am pleased to offer this written testimony **in support of HB 2577**, on behalf of Hazel Health and to advocate for the critical need to expand access to mental health services for Oregon students. HB 2577 allows for the OHA to contract with a qualifying telehealth provider to run a pilot project in school districts that select to participate. As you are aptly aware, the youth mental health crisis is a serious concern, and while Oregon has taken many strides toward addressing the crisis, we believe integrating Hazel Health into the Oregon ecosystem will benefit children greatly.

**Hazel Health** is the nation's largest and most trusted provider of telehealth to the preK-12 population. Throughout the last ten years, Hazel has demonstrated the positive impact of providing virtual healthcare for students—addressing both physical and mental health challenges in real-time and removing many barriers to care such as lack of access to care. Nationwide, Hazel is available to about six (6) million students in seventeen (17) states.

After obtaining parental consent, Hazel's school-centered telehealth model directly connects students with licensed mental health professionals through virtual therapy sessions—right at school or at home and at no out of pocket cost for the family. Our model eliminates the barriers traditionally faced by families, such as transportation challenges, long wait times, and out-of-pocket costs.

Hazel's services are not duplicative of other state-funded mental health programs, such as School Based Health Centers. Instead, Hazel extends the state's capacity by providing support to students in areas these entities cannot currently provide help.

I am also pleased to present a partnership opportunity between the state of Oregon, Hazel Health and a philanthropic organization. This partnership opportunity aims to serve more than 91,000 Oregon students per year with high-quality mental health care, leveraging a combination of state funding (\$2 million) and a generous philanthropic contribution.

## Key Features of the Program:

Hazel Health's programs have demonstrated significant improvements in both student mental health and academic performance. Here are some key outcomes:

- **75% reduction in anxiety and depression** after an average of only six sessions, with **70% of students scoring below the clinical threshold** for anxiety and depression after the program.
- **60% reduction in absenteeism** post-therapy, meaning students are attending school more regularly and receiving the education they deserve.
- **50% reduction in disciplinary action** post-therapy, indicating that improved mental health can directly contribute to a decrease in behavioral issues.

This program offers a significant opportunity to:

- **Improve the mental health and well-being of Oregon students by providing evidence-based care.** Hazel Health delivers clinically proven teletherapy programs with a focus on positive outcomes for students.
- **Reduce the impact of the youth mental health crisis by providing care that is accessible to all - with no cost being passed down to the family.** The program removes financial barriers for families, regardless of insurance coverage.
- **Enhance academic performance and overall student success and significantly reduce chronic absenteeism with Hazel's school-based approach.** Our program seamlessly integrates with existing school systems, complementing existing mental health initiatives, such as MHIT.
- **Strengthen the state's commitment to the mental health of its young people.**

I urge this committee to support the allocation of \$2 million in state funding to this critical initiative. We know that there is a critical need. The OHA workforce survey recognizes this—stating on page 12:

- Oregon has an average of one school psychologist for every 3,393 students, one school social worker for every 8,831 students, and one school counselor for every 461 students. *This is below the recommended ratio for each provider type. (Page 12)*
- *And on page 9, the survey lists that: Telehealth can potentially increase access to care—thus addressing Oregon's health care workforce shortages—by allowing patients to connect with providers outside their home city or region. (Page 9)*

But what it really comes down to is: by investing in the mental health of our children, we are investing in the future of Oregon.

**Thank you for your time. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.**