

SB 729 Testimony

My name is Jasper Smith with the Benton County Developmental Diversity Program in Corvallis. We support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We have also provided mental health services to the people we support for the last 22 years. I am here to urge you to support Senate Bill 729 to prohibit discrimination in mental health services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Discrimination should already be prohibited by the Americans with Disabilities Act integration mandate and the Olmstead decision by the US Supreme Court and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, yet discrimination persists. It is time to have a specific state law consistent with federal law that makes it abundantly clear that discrimination against a protected class of people is unacceptable in Oregon.

We have seen it over and over where people are denied care and access to care, often putting their health and well-being at risk. Clinicians will say that they have not received special training. They do not need special training before services are given. They are trained to work with people and people with disabilities are people. People, regardless of their IQs, have all the same mental health conditions and benefit from all the same treatments as anyone else. Clinicians may say that the person will not benefit from treatment. Research consistently supports that people with developmental disabilities do benefit from treatment as much or more than the general population. Sometimes reasonable accommodations are needed, but those are also legally required and within the skillsets of providers.

There is nothing that needs to be done to prepare for this legislation. We should already be doing it. It is unacceptable to say that services cannot be given because of someone's disability, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, or any other aspect of a person's experience.

People have a right to mental health services as any other covered individual would receive. This is simply a request for people to be treated like people. I hope you will support this affirmation of what should already be happening, but unfortunately it is not yet the case.