

Testimony on HB 2041: Mental Health Professional Parity

February 11, 2025

Chair Nosse and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mary Anne Cooper, and I am the Oregon Director of Public Affairs and Government Relations at Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon, which serves nearly one million Oregonians. In keeping with our values as a tax paying nonprofit, 89% of every premium dollar goes to pay our members' medical claims and expenses. We are writing to express concerns on HB 2041.

We credential our providers to ensure that our members have access to high quality, safe care with providers operating within the scope of their license. Licensed mental health professionals and social workers provide a valuable service to our community, but they are very different professions from physicians, they have different training and education, and their payment should reflect that. While a doctor and licensed mental health professionals may occasionally bill the same codes, their scope of practice is very different, and each is paid according to the services they provide when operating at the top of their license.

The bill's intention to increase access to mental health services is admirable, but unfortunately, it falls short of achieving this goal. Instead, it may have the opposite effect, making mental health services even less accessible to those who need them. The bill will increase the costs of insurance premiums and patient cost shares for services. The increased costs to health care services will make obtaining mental health services unattainable for patients.

Further, in order for Oregon to achieve the stated goal of containing healthcare costs to 3.4% annual growth we are all going to have to make extraordinarily difficult decisions about cost growth and reimbursement rates. Every rate increase or payment mandate that increases costs - no matter how slight they appear - will drive us further from our state's cost



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containment objectives. We hope that value-based payment arrangements will create incentives to eliminate waste in the system, but it is going to be a herculean task to meet a 3.4% goal when over the past 13 years we have rarely been able to contain costs in the healthcare system below 6%. We urge your opposition of HB 2041.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Mary Anne Cooper, Cambia Health Solutions