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To: The Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health

From: Oregon Heals Coalition

Date: February 18, 2025

Re: In Support of Senate Bill 691

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the committee, Oregon's behavioral health needs have been exacerbated since the start of COVID in early 2020, and has been declining well before then. In many categories, Oregon has greater behavioral health needs than the national average.¹ The current mental health system is not adequately serving our communities, especially Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) who have the least access and often face the most stigma when trying to find care.

The Oregon Heals Coalition envisions a robust mental health system that is equitable, affordable, culturally responsive, community-centered, community-driven, and adequately serves those who have historically experienced the least access.

¹ "Mental Health in Oregon",
<https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/oregon/>



This year, the Oregon Heals Coalition built our 2025 Legislative Agenda in partnership with community. To do so, we recruited five Mental Health Champions with backgrounds in the mental health field and determined SB 691 would gain our support as one of our priorities.

The lack of services for substance use disorder and behavioral health breaks families apart and causes lasting trauma for children. Children born to people with substance use disorders are more likely to have child welfare involvement. In 2023, 62.1% of Oregon children entered foster care due to parental drug and alcohol use². However, the impact is not felt equally—Black children were twice as likely to enter foster care, and American Indian or Alaska Native children were more than three times as likely. These disparities stem from systemic inequities in health care access, housing, and culturally responsive treatment options.

Expanding integrated prenatal medical care, substance use disorder treatment, and housing-based supports through programs like Project Nurture or Nurture Oregon can reduce racial disparities in child welfare involvement. These programs have shown to decrease foster placements in the first year of life, decrease risk of child maltreatment, and increase the number of prenatal visits³. Investing in culturally responsive peer support, doula services, and early intervention in substance use disorder treatment is

² Oregon Department of Human Services. (2024). Child Welfare Data Book 2023.

³ McConnell, K. J., Kaufman, M. R., Grunditz, J. I., Bellanca, H., Risser, A., Rodriguez, M. I., & Renfro, S. (2020). Project Nurture Integrates Care And Services To Improve Outcomes For Opioid-Dependent Mothers And Their Children. *Health Affairs*, 39(4), 595–602



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critical to improving outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and other Oregonians of color.

Please join us in supporting equitable, community-driven legislation that will support mothers in receiving the mental health care they need, which in turn, will help to keep families together. **Oregon Heals strongly urges your “YES” vote on SB 691.**

Sincerely,

The Oregon Heals Coalition

