



February 19, 2025

TO: Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
FROM: Association of Oregon Counties Legislative Affairs Manager, Jessica Pratt
RE: Support HB 5025 and local behavioral health system funding

Dear Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Counties, representing Oregon's county governments, I am writing in support of community behavioral health services in HB 5025.

County boards of commissioners are the Local Mental Health Authority, with the duty to administer Oregon's mental health policies, adopt a local mental health plan to serve community needs and provide oversight and accountability of our state-county shared services.

Counties partner with the Oregon Health Authority to provide behavioral health services and supports that help our communities thrive and reduce avoidable state hospital stays and encounters with law enforcement and the courts. Many of these critical services we provide are not eligible for Medicaid reimbursement.

The convergence of Oregon's substance abuse and housing crises along with the federal court order shortening the duration of state hospital stays have driven an increase in caseloads for county services like crisis response, aid and assist community restoration and civil commitment investigation and placements without additional funding to match our mandated provision of care. Combined with a significant work force shortage, our community mental health program staff are bearing the weight of their own growing caseloads and the work of chronically vacant positions.

County governments ask for your support for these funding requests from our community mental health program directors:

- \$64.8 million necessary to narrow the funding gap for court-ordered and crisis services that counties are statutorily mandated to provide;
- \$16.5 million recommended by the Governor to maintain Oregon's investment in life-changing jail diversion services, and
- Behavioral health workforce investments, in addition to POP 550, of
 - \$20 million for a wage differential to retain workers providing the highest acuity public care like crisis response and intensive case management;
 - \$20 million to provide career ladders within community mental health programs by offering tuition assistance, housing stipends, etc

These investments will equip our community mental health programs to meet their statutory obligations and serve more Oregonians with mental health and addictions challenges in the community instead of in our hospitals and jails.

The Association of Oregon Counties asks for your support for the local behavioral health safety net and we thank you for partnering with counties to serve all of Oregon.

Jessica Pratt
Legislative Affairs Manager
Association of Oregon Counties