



February 26, 2025

To: Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Senate Bill 476, sponsored by Senator Jama.

This submission is on behalf of Options Counseling and Family Services. Options provides integrated co-occurring disorders treatment, mental health interventions, family preservation services, psychiatry, and intensive outpatient treatment for youth at risk of higher levels of care. The agency provides services in 14 Oregon Counties, including serving Oregon Health Plan members and children, youth, and families referred through the Oregon Department of Human Services.

It is widely known that Oregon has a severe shortage of mental health professionals. There is a significant need for clinical service providers, with extremely limited access to qualified individuals available to provide treatment. Senate Bill 476 won't completely resolve the challenges, however, when passed, it will provide timely support to individuals who qualify to achieve clinical licensure but are stymied by completing this process due to earning a degree from an international program.

Alexander O'Bryan Tear, a therapist in Options' Portland office, provides intensive home- and community-based services to children and youth. Without targeted, comprehensive services, these young people are likely to require expensive residential placements that separate them from their families. For nearly three years, Dr. O'Bryan Tear has attempted to begin a licensure track through OBLPCT, without success; his postgraduate, PhD degree is from the University of Cambridge in England. He is so committed to providing therapy to Oregon's youth that Dr. O'Bryan Tear is currently considering enrollment in a local master's degree program to move forward with licensure. While a noble goal, the effort should be unnecessary given the breadth of Alexander's experience and the validity of his PhD from the University of Cambridge. In addition, the requirements of additional coursework will reduce access to Dr. O'Bryan Tear's clinical services, with a negative impact on youth most in need of his experience and expertise.

Please join me and other behavioral health agencies in supporting Senate Bill 476. Clear and comprehensive guidance regarding pathways to licensure for individuals educated outside of the United States will increase access to mental health, value clinicians who have completed relevant coursework, and support the children, youth, adults, and families who are eager to engage in effective mental health treatment.

Thank you for supporting Options in our efforts to serve Oregonians.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelli McKnight". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing "K" and "M".

Chief Executive Officer

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