



Chair Patterson and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Tri-County Behavioral Health Providers Association (TCBHPA), we are writing to voice our support of SB 476. This bill will offer timely assistance to individuals who are eligible for clinical licensure but face obstacles in completing the process due to having earned their degree from an international program.

Oregon faces a critical need for behavioral health services. Mental health conditions among Oregonians, especially young adults and adolescents, have risen dramatically during and after the pandemic. While this mirrors larger national trends, the need for mental health professionals is especially high in Oregon. According to a report by the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon ranks fourth in the nation in unmet mental health needs.<sup>1</sup>

These workforce shortages have tangible impacts on our communities, leading to increased caseloads, provider burnout, and limited access to essential services. There is growing public acknowledgment of the intertwined nature of behavioral health issues and homelessness, further emphasizing the need to provide comprehensive mental health and substance use services to mitigate homelessness and cycles of addiction.<sup>4</sup>

SB 476 will play a crucial role in facilitating the entry of qualified professionals into the behavioral health workforce. By addressing the barriers faced by individuals with degrees from international programs, the bill ensures that these professionals can complete the licensing process and begin contributing to the field. This will not only help alleviate workforce shortages but also improve the availability and quality of care for individuals in need of behavioral health services.

While we strongly support SB 476 as a means to increase provider availability, we recognize that **retaining and expanding the behavioral health workforce also requires sustainable reimbursement rates**. We continue to urge the Legislature to pair these initiatives with meaningful rate increases to ensure that qualified providers can and will continue to serve Oregon's communities effectively.

We appreciate your leadership in advancing policies that strengthen our behavioral health system and encourage your support of these bills as part of a broader commitment to ensuring access to care.

Thank you for your consideration,

**The TCBHPA Board of Directors**