

Submitter: Laura Zuschlag

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2029

Dear Chairman Nosse and Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care:

My name is Laura Zuschlag, I am an LCSW working full-time as a psychotherapist in Columbia and Multnomah Counties, Oregon and have been practicing for 5 years. I am writing this letter in support of HB2029.

We are living through a mental health epidemic. People are reaching out for support more now than ever, but they have such difficulty finding providers that accept their insurance. Many people outside of the field may not realize that a lot of therapists do not work with insurance companies at all, rather they only accept cash payment for their services specifically to avoid the insecurity and anxiety of insurance audits and clawbacks. I know of scores of cash-pay therapists who can't fill their caseloads and are always looking for referrals while therapists who take insurance may be turning away 20 people every week. If we could establish greater protections for therapy providers to support them in the event of an audit, I believe many more therapists would take insurance and we could finally make a dent in the work that needs to be done to support Oregonians in recovering their mental health and living more fulfilling, functional lives (read: with less reliance on state supports!).

As for me, I chose to build my practice to work with insurance companies so that I can support disenfranchised folks who could never afford to pay for clinical mental health services otherwise. Working in alignment with my values comes at a cost and that cost is the constant risk of an audit when I, as a provider, have so little protections. Can you imagine working a job with an ever-present threat that your income for the past several months (or years) could be taken back at any moment? No matter how fastidious I am in my work and my practice, this fear is always with me.

Please consider the incredible impact supporting this bill could have on Oregonians which, most importantly, could increase access to mental health support for those most vulnerable. Access to this type of support is often the difference between life and death, the difference between staying at home and psychiatric hospitalization, the difference between employment and unemployment, the difference between safe and abusive relationships, and so many other examples.

Please vote to support HB2029 and vote to support increasing access to mental

health care for those who need it the most. Thank you for your time, consideration, and support of HB 2029.

With care,

Laura Zuschlag, LCSW