

March 19, 2025

Senator Lisa Reynolds, MD, Chair
Early Childhood and Behavioral Health Committee
Oregon State Legislature

RE: SB 142-1 – Behavioral Health Workforce Improvements

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Andersen, and the Early Childhood Behavioral Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for SB 142-1, which would establish critical funding for behavioral health workforce development grants that focus - in part - on priority populations, and provide infrastructure support that determines programs of study based on industry recommendations aligned with areas of workforce shortage.

Four years out from the height of the pandemic, the Multnomah County community continues to struggle with behavioral health issues, including substance use disorders (SUD), suicide, and other mental health crises. We anticipate the stressors of the present day will continue to be a burden to those trying to achieve behavioral wellness. Sadly, we also continue to face a workforce shortage that cripples our ability to provide adequate services to all who need them.

Multnomah County's Health Department, and specifically the Behavioral Health Division and Public Health's Program Design and Evaluation Services team, have engaged several dozen Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and systems partners over the past eight months in an effort to launch a System Transformation as part of its Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP). In addition to human resources data from within the County, CBOs routinely share that they, too, are facing a workforce shortage that impacts the number of clients they are able to serve with their mental health or substance use disorder recovery programs.

One of the foundational goals of Multnomah County's System Transformation/CLP+ effort is to *"develop the Behavioral Health Workforce so that the Multnomah County Health Department, system partners and community providers can provide core safety net services at full capacity with qualified behavioral health professionals maintaining sustainable caseloads."*

SB 142-1 is consistent with the actions we've committed to undertaking in our System Transformation efforts, including developing more intentional and proactive engagement with colleges, universities, and licensure/certification boards to develop partnerships that further

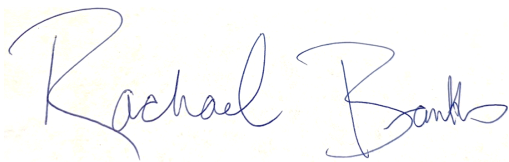
career pipelines in needed disciplines; providing field practice placements; and maintaining/expanding existing retention efforts such as paid training opportunities, certifications or gaining additional clinical supervision, education or training to allow for growth within the profession, with specific priority given to culturally specific training opportunities.

SB 142-1 provides a strong support to our efforts by appropriating nearly \$50 million toward grant programming and reporting for the state. We are heartened by the foundations of this bill as it uses data from a workgroup established to study the barriers to workforce recruitment and retention, administrative burden, reimbursement rates and pay, and equity needs to form its recommendations.

Multnomah County Behavioral Health has administered a behavioral health workforce incentive (BHWI) grant since Fall 2023. Based on that experience, we know that more than 20% of the BHWI funds are being used for culturally specific training to better serve our BIPOC communities. We've also discovered that we need additional options for retaining the best of the best; this legislation will provide opportunities for Multnomah County and other critical community based providers to grow and retain the workforce that we need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Rachael Banks, Director
Multnomah County Health Department