

## **Testimony in Support of Oregon House Bill 2024**

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Javadi & Nelson, and Members of the Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care,

My name is Whitney Marcelino, and I am the Case Manager at Rooted Mental Health in Salem. I'm reaching out to express my deep support for Oregon House Bill 2024, a vital piece of legislation that seeks to make meaningful investments in our behavioral health providers' recruitment, retention, and support. This bill is a crucial step toward addressing the workforce shortages and the many challenges we face in the behavioral health sector here in Oregon.

As a case manager, I witness firsthand the struggles that arise from these shortages. Every day, I meet individuals in desperate need of timely care but find it challenging to access support due to the limited number of available providers. It's particularly heartbreaking to see those from low-income and underserved communities facing significant barriers in getting the help they need. I can also relate to the difficulties of managing higher education alongside family responsibilities, as financial constraints and a lack of adequate support can hinder motivated individuals from entering or remaining in this rewarding field.

### **Scholarships and Tuition Assistance**

Providing scholarships and tuition assistance is essential for helping compassionate individuals embark on careers in behavioral health. HB 2024 creates equitable pathways for diverse candidates by offering these opportunities, ensuring that our workforce reflects the rich diversity of our communities and is prepared to meet the needs of all Oregonians.

### **Loan Forgiveness and Repayment Incentives**

Many aspiring behavioral health providers graduate with overwhelming student debt, which can deter them from pursuing or continuing in this crucial field. By offering loan forgiveness and repayment incentives, I feel we can alleviate this financial strain and empower more professionals to commit to long-term careers in Oregon's mental health and substance use treatment systems.

### **Housing Assistance**

The challenge of affordable housing can weigh heavily on many providers, particularly those serving in rural and underserved areas. By introducing housing assistance, HB 2024 can help foster workforce stability and enable providers to live and work in the communities they serve with passion and dedication.

### **Wage Increases and Retention Bonuses**

We must offer competitive wages and retention bonuses to ensure that we maintain continuity of care and keep our skilled behavioral health providers with us. Recognizing their expertise and commitment is essential to reducing burnout and turnover, allowing clients to receive the consistent support they deserve.

**Child Care Support**

Access to affordable child care is a significant concern for many working parents, including those in our field. I understand how the lack of quality childcare options can add a layer of stress to providers' lives. Supporting childcare initiatives through HB 2024 can help alleviate this burden, allowing our providers to focus on their vital work while ensuring their children are well cared for.

**Professional Development Opportunities**

Finally, ongoing professional development is crucial for delivering high-quality care and helping providers enhance their skills. The training and career growth investments outlined in HB 2024 will empower our dedicated professionals to continue learning and stay informed on best practices, ultimately leading to better client outcomes.

I urge you to support and advocate for Oregon House Bill 2024. The comprehensive measures proposed in this legislation will strengthen our behavioral health workforce and promote equitable access to care for all residents. Thank you for taking the time to consider this critical issue—I genuinely appreciate your attention and dedication to making a difference!

Sincerely,  
Whitney Marcelino, QMHA  
Case Manager  
Rooted Mental Health