

Submitter: Barbara Balowitz
On Behalf Of: WOMHA
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB824

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

I am a licensed clinical social worker practicing in Salem and a member of the Western Oregon Mental Health Alliance (WOMHA). My testimony is in support of SB 824 with the -1 amendment to allow the Department of Consumer and Business Services to continue collecting important data from insurers on behavioral health parity as required by HB 3046 (2021).

In the past my reimbursement rates from many insurance companies were stagnant over the course of many years. Some insurers decreased my rates, which led me to consider the sustainability of staying in network as the cost of living continues to increase. I was very surprised years ago when my rates were dropped precipitously by one insurer without any notice. I have resigned from several insurance panels directly because of unsustainably low reimbursement rates.

With the passage of HB 3046 in 2021, my reimbursement rates have increased for the first time in many, many years. These increases have made it more sustainable to stay in network and provide services with a broad spectrum of financial means. I have considered private pay but I don't like the inequity of linking financial means to access to care.

Lower rates can overburden a practitioner who might feel devalued, work longer hours and experience burn out.

Allowing the HB 3046 reporting requirements to end would allow some insurers to return to their previous practices of undervaluing behavioral health services and operating with inadequate behavioral health networks which effectively discriminates against their members with behavioral health conditions. Please pass SB824 with the -1 amendment to keep insurance company practices transparent and protect access to behavioral health care.

Respectfully,

Barbara M. Balowitz, LCSW, BCD