

April 9, 2025

TO: Co-Chairs and members of the Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

FROM: Association of Oregon Counties Legislative Affairs Manager, Jessica Pratt

RE: SB 881

Dear Co-Chairs Prozanski and Kropf and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Counties, representing Oregon's county governments, I am writing to thank you and the proponents of SB 881 for your attention to the need for process improvement for the administration of local Behavioral Health Resource Network (BHRN) grant funds. While AOC has no position on SB 881, we are both grateful for the light it shines on the persistent and grievous issues in the governance of Drug Treatment and Recovery Services Fund allocations and concerned about the destabilizing effect that SB 881 in its current form would have on local substance abuse response capacity.

The services provided by Oregon's BHRN grantees have become a critical part of the local behavioral health safety net, a safety net which counties are statutorily responsible to plan and oversee. Community mental health programs serving 31 of our 36 counties receive BHRN grants and rural programs are especially reliant on these dollars to fill system gaps that are not covered by Medicaid.

It is critical that the state's process for allocating these resources:

- honors Oregon's proud tradition of open government,
- is transparent and responsive to public comment,
- has a formal connection to the local mental health authority and the expertise of our community mental health programs
- provides a sound appeals process
- and prioritizes stability in grant making to buffer local behavioral health systems against inevitable fluctuations in the cannabis tax revenue that funds the Behavioral Health Resource Networks.

While SB 881 rightly aims to address the ongoing failure of the Oversight and Accountability Council to meet these expectations, the bill also directs the Criminal

Justice Commission to prioritize a broader array of purposes for Drug Treatment and Recovery Services Fund allocations. This would effectively divert funding from local addiction treatment and support capacity provided through BHRN grants, capacity which will already be reduced as of July 1 due to lower cannabis tax revenues, and in some counties, drastically reduced due to the actions taken by the Oversight and Accountability Council.

County boards are the Local Mental Health Authority and the Local Public Health Authority, with the statutory obligation to plan and administer the behavioral health and public health safety net for the whole community, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. Counties are also the critical connection between the courts, law enforcement, homelessness and disabilities services, and other local partners to ensure a complete continuum of services that foster public safety and promote wellbeing.

The urgency to stabilize local substance abuse response capacity is compounded by the reliance of our nascent county deflection programs on their BHRN providers. Many of our deflection coordinators tell us that their programs simply will not work without their current BHRN capacity.

We look forward to working with you in the coming days to find consensus on solutions which ensure good governance of this revenue stream and provide maximum stability for the services that our communities and our county deflection programs rely on to support individuals on their path to recovery from problem substance use. Thank you for partnering with AOC and counties to serve all of Oregon.

Jessica Pratt  
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Association of Oregon Counties