

DATE: May 13, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Ben Bowman, Chair
House Committee on Rules

FROM: Ebony Clarke, Director
Behavioral Health Division
Oregon Health Authority

SUBJECT: House Bill 3835 -A5

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Pham, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding HB 3835 -A5, which represents a critical step forward in improving behavioral health care access and outcomes for Oregon's children, youth, and families. OHA has been involved in the planning and drafting of this bill, and strongly encourages the committee to vote in support.

Improving Access and Growing Capacity

House Bill 3835 -A5 reinforces Oregon's commitment to increasing behavioral health access for children, including those served by the Oregon Health Plan (OHP). It also reflects our shared obligation to grow statewide capacity for children's behavioral health services. While significant investments have been made in recent years, especially in prevention and early intervention, we continue to see substantial gaps—particularly in services for youth in foster care and with complex needs.

Workforce Retention and Safety Improvements

The behavioral health workforce is the backbone of our care system. HB 3835 -A5 addresses ongoing concerns from providers and families about workforce retention, safety, and clarity around care expectations. By establishing consistent definitions and standards for abuse, neglect, restraint, and seclusion, this bill helps ensure providers are well-informed and well-trained, creating safer and more supportive environments for youth in home, school, community, and residential settings.

Clear, standardized expectations reduce confusion and fear among staff about how their actions will be interpreted, which can otherwise lead to high turnover and burnout. This clarity is critical to staff retention, quality of care, and ultimately the safety of the children we serve.

Community-Driven and Child-Centered Policy

This legislation is the result of meaningful collaboration between state agencies, providers, and youth and families through the System of Care Advisory Council's Safety of Children in Acute Care Safety Committee, convened in 2022. That committee's work was instrumental in shaping the policies embedded in this bill, ensuring that they are responsive to lived experience and grounded in both compassion and accountability.

Supporting Access to Medically Necessary Care

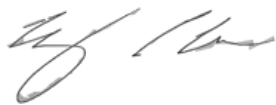
Importantly, HB 3835 -A5 removes long-standing barriers that prevent children in state custody from accessing medically necessary behavioral health treatment when those services are only available out of state. Every child deserves timely and appropriate care, no matter where that care exists. This provision affirms our shared commitment to meeting children's needs, especially in urgent or specialized situations.

Conclusion

HB 3835 -A5 maintains the need to keep children safe from harm while supporting workforce retention and system capacity. It represents a step forward in creating a more responsive, equitable, and effective behavioral health system for children and families in Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ebony Clarke', is positioned above the typed name.

Ebony Clarke, Director
Behavioral Health Division
Oregon Health Authority