

Submitter: Garrison Cox
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4028

I appreciate this bill and even wish it would go further. Therapists in independent private practice are the backbone of the therapy industry. As one such therapist, my reasons for building my own practice include wanting the benefits that come with setting my own schedule and being able to choose my own supervision, as well as the fact that most community mental health or group practice positions pay far below the median wage, especially for someone with a three year master's degree. The level of power and influence between insurance companies and even the largest group practices or mental health organizations is incredibly lopsided in favor of insurance companies - let alone between those companies and independent therapist/counselor practitioners! We need help in order to ensure that we are operating with systems that are fair, and that don't place such an administrative burden on our billing processes that we must commit our non-billable time to advocating for our clients and patients so that they can continue to access life-saving, functioning-improving, quality-of-life ensuring care.

It's a good start to limit what manipulative practices these insurers can use to claw back money for services already rendered - read: hours already worked, care already given - to people who are suffering. However, in the wake of the Care Oregon billing and networking changes from the last year, with most independent therapists and counselors being kicked off the network unless they join a group that has a Certificate of Approval, even more must be done to improve access to mental healthcare for Oregonians. I personally had six clients lose access to me after that contracting change, and then several of them lost access to providers I referred them to because Care Oregon kicked off licensed independent practitioners the day after associate independent practitioners lost access to billing for that network. Furthermore, few Certificates of Approval are being granted each month, further reducing access to counselors for those Oregonians most in need. It is my opinion that Oregon Health Authority should mandate that their networks must grant access to independent practitioners. I do not believe that the research they have done has taken into account all stakeholders, nor follows ethical guidelines for continuity of care that we therapists and counselors are required to follow.