



**Testimony Before the
Senate Health and Human Services regarding SB 823
Presented by Dr. James Lace
on behalf of the Oregon Medical Association
April 9, 2013**

Chair Monnes Anderson, Vice-Chair Kruse, members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dr. James Lace and I chair the Legislative Committee of the Oregon Medical Association. I am a pediatrician practicing in Salem. I am also testifying on behalf of the Oregon Pediatric Society.

The OMA supports SB 823. It will increase the state's capacity to provide mental health services to individuals with mental illness through both existing and new programs. It will create a robust mental health system that will help all Oregonians lead healthier lives and makes our schools and communities safer.

As a pediatrician, I find myself often on the "front lines" of identifying and addressing mental health illness in my patients. I am often the first place families seek care, which provides an opportunity for me to screen the child and discuss preventive services and appropriate referrals. While I remain the child's primary care provider, I may or may not be involved in the child's behavioral health plan or in some cases, I may be the only "behavioral" health provider to which the family has access (whether for geographic, insurance or other reasons). Neither of these situations provides the patient with optimal care.

Integrating mental health services into the medical home model is critical to the success of the coordinated care model and Oregon's ongoing health transformation efforts. By blending together these different lines of medical services into one integrated program, the state hopes to achieve the goals of better health outcomes, healthier patients and reduced costs. When I was a medical student, one of my pediatric psychiatric preceptors told me that the new norm for disease would not be infectious diseases but would be psychosocial diseases. I didn't understand her brilliant forecasting at the time since I was dealing with life threatening infectious diseases on a daily basis. Today, I practice medicine in the world she predicted- psychosocial diseases do take up a considerable amount of my appointment time. As a primary care physician, at least 30% of my time is spent on behavioral health issues. Some days it approaches 100% of my time. I now treat infectious disease as a volunteer physician in developing countries, such as Tanzania and Haiti.

SB 823 coordinates mental health services across the spectrum- at the state, community, health care systems and school level- to treat all aspects of mental illness. SB 823 includes a number of strategies to wrap behavioral health services around health services, including a help line by which a primary care physician (like myself) who is treating a person 18 years of age or under may consult with a child psychiatrist. The Oregon Psychiatric Access Line for Kids (OPAL-K) is

a developing program that is a current partnership between the Oregon Pediatric Society, OHSU, Oregon Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Oregon Family Support Network that links child psychiatry with primary care providers in a clinician-to-clinician consultation system. Connecting through phone calls or videoconferencing technology enable me to maximize my clinical skills while the patient is in my office. Similar programs in other states have shown that a help line like OPAL-K decreases more costly behavioral health services such as inpatient interventions. Support and investment in this program and other programs are a better way to prevent mental health disturbances through screening, diagnosis and coordinated treatment.

I would like to thank you once again for the opportunity to address the committee regarding this very important topic and I'm happy to answer any questions. Please support SB 823.

The Oregon Medical Association is an organization of over 8,100 physicians, physician assistants, and medical students organized to serve and support physicians in their efforts to improve the health of Oregonians. Additional information can be found at www.theOMA.org.