



TO: The Senate Committee on Health Care and Human Services
FR: Larry Conner, MA LPC, President COPACT
DA: March 7, 2013
RE: Support for SB 491, Improving Access to Mental Health Services

The Coalition of Oregon Professional Associations for Counseling and Therapy (COPACT) represents Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs) across Oregon. We are here to testify in support of SB 491, which allows Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists to provide mental health services to adolescent clients on the same basis as other licensed practitioners.

Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists have been licensed to practice in Oregon Statutes since 1991. LPCs and LMFTs are highly trained Masters level mental health providers who offer psychotherapy services to individuals of all ages, families, couples, groups, and organizations throughout Oregon.

There are 3,500 LPCs, LMFTs, and registered interns. That means each week LPCs, LMFTs, and registered interns work with well over 70,000 Oregonians seeking services in mental health clinics, private practices, colleges, hospitals, prisons, and rehabilitation agencies.

Current statute allows a teen 14 years of age or older to consent to a variety of outpatient mental health and chemical dependency treatment services. Under Oregon Law, services provided to consenting teens by a physician, a psychologist, a nurse practitioner, and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker are authorized in statute. SB 491 would simply add Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists to current law.

Teens seek help for a variety of issues such as, drug or alcohol abuse, depression or anxiety. Some parents are abusive, neglectful or facing challenges of their own that can create barriers for teens seeking help. And, following a divorce, teens can sometimes get caught up in parental conflict, finding it hard to obtain permission for counseling services. Creating parity between all providers of mental health services helps ensure an LPC or LMFT is not forced to turn away a teen in crisis because of a lack of ability to provide services.

Current statute could inhibit LPCs and LMFTs from contracting with newly forming CCOs due to a lack of parity with other providers under the law. SB 491 levels the playing field between all licensed mental health providers in Oregon. Creating this type of parity will help ensure the broadest network of providers is available and will support access to care throughout Oregon, especially in rural and underserved parts of the state.

SB 491 does not change any other provisions in current law. Exemptions for OHA recognized community mental health agencies and liability provisions remain the same.

SB 491 is good for Oregon families and teens. It creates parity among mental health care providers, helps ensure access to mental health services and supports appropriate treatment for troubled teens.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We ask your support for SB 491.