

Date April 27, 2015

TO: The Honorable Mitch Greenlick, Chair
House Committee on Health Care

FROM: Michael Hlebechuk
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SUBJECT: SB 229

Chair Greenlick and members of the committee: I am Michael Hlebechuk, Director of the Office of Consumer Activities within the Addictions and Mental Health Division (AMH) of the Oregon Health Authority. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 229, which seeks to allow AMH to compensate members of the Oregon Consumer Advisory Council (OCAC) for participation in Council and sub-committee meetings.

AMH brought this bill forward so we can remove a barrier to inclusive and broad participation by consumers who serve on the Advisory Council. This change is supported by AMH's philosophy and policy that consumers should be reimbursed for serving in official advisory capacity to AMH. The current language in ORS 430.073 states members "...are not entitled to compensation or reimbursement expenses..." and is in conflict with AMH's current ability to reimburse consumers for participation on other AMH advisory committees.

When considering appointments to the Council, ORS 430.073 directs AMH to "strive to balance the representation according to geographic areas of the state and age." In keeping with this directive, AMH has appointed individuals to the Council from the far reaches of Oregon. Because of our inability to reimburse members for their travel costs, we have also lost many members from the far reaches as a result.

Individuals with mental health and substance use disorders have higher rates of poverty than individuals without a behavioral health disorder. Providing expenditure reimbursement and compensation for participation on OCAC is vital to ensuring meaningful participation by consumers of behavioral health services and

their family members.

Providing participation stipends and travel reimbursements to members of the council is consistent with Oregon Revised Statute 292.495, which states, “Except as otherwise provided by law, all members of state boards and commissions, including those employed in full-time public service, may receive actual and necessary travel or other expenses actually incurred in the performance of their official duties within the limits provided by law or by the Oregon Department of Administrative Services under ORS 292.210 .”

We are currently not allowed to pay stipends or reimbursements for travel expenses for members of OCAC. If this SB 229 is approved, using federal block grant dollars, AMH will provide a fifty dollar stipend for participating to all Council members who are attending on their own time, as well as a travel reimbursement to all members who incur travel costs.

This will make a big difference in people’s ability to sustain participation in OCAC. One gentleman drives up from Grant’s Pass and his cost to participate is \$300 per bi-monthly meeting, or \$1800 annually. That is a significant burden for someone who is financially disadvantaged. At AMH, we value the input into mental health and addiction policy and service delivery that our OCAC members provide. This bill will allow the state to reduce the burden and show its appreciation for the time, travel, and guidance Council members have thus far been donating.

The Council is composed of appointed members from across the state. If this concept is not approved, participation in OCAC will continue to be a financial burden for members and broad representation will be negatively impacted. Accordingly, AMH urges passage of SB 229 as it will remedy this financial burden to council members and bring OCAC in line with statute that directs agencies to provide stipends and travel reimbursement to members of Oregon public commissions, committees and councils.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 229. I’m happy to answer any questions.