



## WESTERN RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Oregon State Legislature Re: HB 2723 (House Committee on Health Care 1<sup>st</sup> Hearing)

Testimony: February 13, 2017

Chair, Representative Greenlick, Vice Chair, Representative Hayden, and Vice Chair Nosse, members of the Committee. For the record, name is Joseph Gallegos. I am the owner of Western Research Associates, a social Research and Development Consulting firm. I am also Professor Emeritus at the University of Portland where I retired after a 35-year academic career. My training was in psychiatric social work with doctoral study in cross-cultural mental health and a post-doc in mental health research. Some might refer to me as a “so called” expert. But, it is with this background that I speak in support of the bill before you.

I suspect that all of us have family, friends, or acquaintances who suffer perhaps from Intellectual or Developmental Disability, or maybe a military Veteran or a victim of domestic violence, or even a recently arrived refugee. All of these and many others run the risk of suffering from long-term trauma. Trauma Informed Care has become somewhat of a buzz word in the human services, and not without reason. We know in the mental health community that mental and physical stress, especially toxic stress, causes long-lasting effects of trauma. We also know that the growing field of animal-assisted-therapy has demonstrated a significant contribution to the reduction of the deleterious effects of that trauma. My alma mater, the University of Denver, actually has an international Master’s program that awards a certificate in animal assisted therapy. As you will hear from those testifying after me, practitioners in the field, this is NOT unproven science. This bill addresses the need for better access to a best-practice health/mental health intervention.

Scientific merits aside, in a time when our citizens are being particularly traumatized by a fear of loss of access to health care, this bill would expand access to some of our most vulnerable citizens. The bill seeks to strike the exclusion of “hippotherapy” from the Oregon Health Plan. However, the intent is more broadly meant to recognize both the physical and mental health therapeutic value of this intervention. I believe there is an amendment coming to clarify that broader intent.

My colleagues from the field can speak more directly to those aspects. For now, I encourage you to support this bill, proceed to working the bill, and, sending it on to the floor with a do-pass recommendation.

Respectfully,

Joseph Gallegos, Ph.D.