



Testimony in support of SB 1553

Removing barriers for people with co-occurring behavioral health disorders

February 3, 2020

Dear Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health,

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs (AOCMHP), I am writing to urge your support of SB 1553 which seeks to remove barriers that currently limit the behavioral health workforce and hinder access to treatment. AOCMHP represents community mental health program directors across the state, who are responsible for managing the behavioral health safety net in their counties and ensuring people have access to services and supports, many of whom have co-occurring mental illness and addictions.

The bill will help us make progress in tackling the behavioral health emergency we see in our hospitals, in our corrections and education systems, and in our efforts to address the housing crisis. It does this by asking OHA to assess the barriers that exist to treatment for people with co-occurring disorders, as overlap frequently exists between an individual's addiction and mental health challenges. Treatment can and should be provided concurrently.

The bill is short and simple: OHA identifies and details barriers to co-occurring treatment, makes recommendations for reducing them, and reports those recommendations to the Legislature in the fall of 2020. OHA is directed to return with a list of rulemaking or legislative solutions that would remove these barriers as well as a cost estimate for a rate that would reflect the increased complexity of patients with co-occurring disorders.

While we recognize choices about strategic investment in behavioral health will be made in the 2021 long session, we need to do the work today to prepare our decision makers for that discussion. These recommendations will provide a menu of items for the 2021 Legislature to consider.

Please support SB 1553 to improve access to healthcare and supports for people with co-occurring behavioral health disorders.

Sincerely,

Cheryl L. Ramirez
Director, AOCMHP