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House Committee on Behavioral Health:

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Counties, representing all 36 County governments, I write in support of HB 2949 -23 (and the upcoming -24 amendments), the bill to increase Oregon's statewide behavioral health workforce. We know that workforce is a critical component to ensuring behavioral health access, and that it is one of the most valuable resources for the success of the behavioral health field system.

There are several reasons why this bill will make important changes to the behavioral health system in Oregon, including:

- Prioritizes access for underserved communities, including those in rural communities
- Provides financial incentives to acquire and retain workers
- Makes generous investments to Counties and Community Mental Health Programs for transition services as previously incarcerated individuals reintegrate into the community; and to ensure behavioral health access for underserved communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would also like to note that while HB 2949 addresses a key issue in Oregon's behavioral health crisis, coordination is *required* among the several other behavioral health changes being proposed this year, in addition to aligning the current system with current need. We have a siloed system, in which behavioral health treatment is difficult to access, and the pathways between new changes to the system are necessary for the overall success of these efforts.

Finally, as changes are made to the behavioral health system, we request that Counties, and their Community Mental Health Programs are included formally and informally in task forces, workgroups, and other decision-making tables.

We encourage the committee to pass this important bill, and to fortify the behavioral health workforce in Oregon urgently.

Lizzy Atwood Wills

Legislative Affairs Manager, Health and Human Services

Association of Oregon Counties