

Testimony in Support of HB 2508
Diane Solomon
April 26, 2021

Dear Senate Healthcare Chair Paterson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 2508. As a Board member of ONA and Nurse Practitioners of Oregon, I represent 15,000 registered nurses and nurse practitioners across the state. I have practiced as a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner and Certified Nurse-Midwife in rural, tribal, and urban Oregon for over 35 years and I stand with ONA in support of HB 2508.

Patient-centered care and access to care should be the main drivers of healthcare delivery. Telehealth is nothing less than a pandemic revolution that has changed healthcare delivery—especially mental healthcare delivery. It has improved outcomes in a positive, transformative way. Telehealth must be reimbursed fully by payers and should never be rolled back.

As we know, access to mental healthcare in Oregon traditionally nears 50th of all states in the nation, and the pandemic has driven up rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and every mental health diagnosis; over 2020, due to mushrooming mental health needs, I worked 40 percent more than in 2019.

I have seen scores of patients over the last year that I have never met in person. I was concerned it would be difficult to establish therapeutic rapport and successful psychiatric treatment via telehealth. But I have been amazed and encouraged that patients over the past year have improved as quickly and robustly as patients in person. Furthermore, patients have been able to attend visits more consistently, rarely missing appointments, thus improving pace and adequacy of recovery. This consistent care prevents catastrophic events and hospitalizations in mental healthcare as effectively as in physical healthcare. Thus, telehealth proactively saves countless healthcare dollars while offering effective prevention, continuing recovery and treatment.

My practice is full of healthcare providers: nurses, nurse practitioners, and physicians. Now more than ever, accumulating evidence shows healthcare providers' mental health needs are critical. And now more than ever, healthcare providers' ability to care for themselves on someone else's schedule, across town, is most trying. Telehealth allows frontline providers to care for themselves so they can keep providing care to others. Skyrocketing costs of burnout, stress, depression, anxiety, and other behavioral health disorders that affect provider productivity and ability to work are thus avoided as well.

In my practice, I specialize in women's mental health. When mothers suffer depression, anxiety, or other mental health disorders, known and catastrophic downstream effects ensue. Children of these mothers suffer psychiatric diagnoses, impaired cognitive, social, and academic functioning, and lifelong sequelae—often including entry into our criminal justice system. These mothers are now functioning on overdrive, often trying to work as well as parent, facilitate online school, and deal with their children's very real pandemic stressors as well. Telehealth allows these mothers critical mental health treatment so they and their children can continue to thrive.

Telehealth vastly improves the ability of patients to access effective treatment. I have no doubt telehealth will be a driver for improving Oregon's statistics on access and outcomes for mental health and substance abuse disorders, improving our state's standing nationally.

For all these reasons, I urge your support for HB 2508. Thank you.

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