



March 1, 2021

Dear Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs Leif and Ruiz, and Members of the House Human Services Committee:

As Executive Director of the Oregon Alliance we are in support of HB2424 – The Child Safety and Workforce Improvement Act. The Oregon Alliance is non-profit dedicated to championing and advocating for the health and well-being of children, youth, families and communities across Oregon. Annually, our member organizations serve over 100,000 children, youth and families.

In a 2019 *Mental Health of America* report, Oregon ranks the last out of 51 states and territories in terms of access to behavioral health care for youth and suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 10-24 and has been on the rise since 2011. For youth of color, they are 25.2% more likely to use alcohol in comparison to white youth. To improve safety and support more positive outcomes for children and youth, we must invest and diversify our community-based workforce.

Our staff show up every day for youth and children. They are genuinely motivated with a genuine desire to help youth. But they have high caseloads, are working in a complicated regulatory environment, and are working with youth and children with significant and complex needs. All the while, they receive poor compensation – benefits, wages and a lack of advancement opportunities.

Currently, we have a 40 to 60% annual turnover of our staff leading to disruptions in care, increased costs and negative impacts on care quality. This high turnover produces significant costs to organizations, children and families, preventing the long-term sustainability of best/evidence-based practices.

This bill makes crucial investments in our workforce. Specifically, the Child Safety and Workforce Improvement Act will invest:

- \$1.25M per biennium in training funds to improve child/youth safety, treatment outcomes, regulatory compliance, and improve the retention and recruitment of a well-trained, highly qualified provider workforce.
- \$2.5M per biennium to support the recruitment and retention of staff of color.
- \$250K per biennium for student loan forgiveness focusing on QMHA's or social service designated staff.
- \$250K per biennium to begin an apprentice program for QMHAs/Ps, initial start-up costs for 25 apprentices.

I appreciate your continued commitment in ensuring children, youth and families have access to high-quality supports and services so more children can have the opportunity to grow up in strong, stable and loving families.

Sincerely,
Royce Bowlin
Executive Director