



**TO:** Chair Sanchez, Vice Chairs Moore-Green and Nosse, & Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health  
**FROM:** Disability Rights Oregon  
**DATE:** March 3, 2021  
**RE:** HB 2949, Testimony in Support with Amendments

Chair, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee:

Disability Rights Oregon (“DRO”) submits this testimony in support of HB 2949 with proposed amendments, which would improve inclusion of Black, indigenous, and people of color in the mental health workforce, and establish a Task Force on Expanding the Mental Health Workforce.

We thank Representatives Bynum, Alonso Leon, Schouten, Reardon, and Senator Frederick for bringing this legislation forward and sponsoring the bill.

We recognize the integral role that individuals in the mental health care workforce who are Black, indigenous, and people of color, have in providing culturally appropriate services to those communities of concern. We also believe that it is important to recognize that persons with disabilities can play an equally vital role in providing culturally and linguistically affirmative and accessible mental health services to persons accessing those services.

**Including persons with disabilities in the program to improve representation in the mental health workforce advances culturally affirmative mental health services and promotes greater workforce equity that closes the employment gap for persons with disabilities.**

Disability Rights Oregon proposes that HB 2949 should be amended to include persons with disabilities in the program to improve representation in the mental health workforce. Greater inclusion for persons with disabilities in the mental health workforce will better ensure culturally and linguistically affirmative and accessible services for individuals with disabilities. Individuals who have lived experience with mental illness or other disabilities are uniquely qualified to provide culturally sensitive and accessible mental health services to individuals seeking those services.

DRO’s proposed amendments also promote greater workforce equity for persons with disabilities within the mental health workforce. The program would help to address the considerable employment gap between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities:

- Oregonians with disabilities aged 18 to 64 years are employed at a rate of 41.4%, whereas individuals without disabilities are employed at a rate of 78.4%.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. (2019). *2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium*, p. 39 (Table 3.2). <https://disabilitycompendium.org/>

- The percentage of employed Black Oregonians with disabilities is much lower at 25%, which represents an employment gap of 53.4% compared with the rate of employment for persons without disabilities in the general population.<sup>2</sup>

HB 2949 with DRO's proposed amendments would promote greater workforce equity and have a positive impact on the employment gap for Oregonians with disabilities. Importantly, the disability-related employment gap has had a particularly disproportionate impact on Black, indigenous, and people of color who also have a disability. For those reasons, the proposed amendments reflect a key intersectionality between race, ethnicity, and disability. Recognizing that intersection in the proposed program would improve representation in our mental health workforce and create better access for the consumers that seek mental health services.

### **Inclusion of consumers of mental health services on the Task Force on Expanding the Mental Health Workforce should be mandatory.**

Representation of individuals who access mental health services on the Task Force on Expanding the Mental Health Workforce is essential to ensuring that those expansions are consumer-driven and that regulatory recommendations improve programs, services, and resources for persons with disabilities. Disability Rights Oregon has proposed amendments that modify the existing wording in order to guarantee that there will be some representation of consumers of mental health services. The wording contained in the bill as introduced ultimately gives the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives discretion as to whether they will appoint any representatives of consumers of mental health services. By using the conjunction "or" the wording means that the President and Speaker may either appoint "mental health professionals" or representatives of "consumers of mental health services." DRO proposes that the President and Speaker each appoint one "mental health professional" and two representatives of "consumers of mental health services." Alternatively, the bill text could be modified to ensure that at least one representative of "consumers of mental health services" is appointed each by the President and Speaker.

Disability Rights Oregon supports HB 2949 with the proposed amendments attached to this testimony. Those amendments improve the legislation by including persons with disabilities in the program to improve representation of communities of concern in the mental health workforce and consumers of mental health services in the envisioned Task Force.

### **About Disability Rights Oregon**

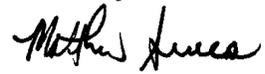
Disability Rights Oregon is a statewide nonprofit that upholds the civil rights of 950,000 people with disabilities in Oregon to live, work, and engage in the community. Disability Rights Oregon serves as a watchdog as we work to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential. Since 1977, the organization has served as Oregon's federally authorized and mandated Protection & Advocacy System.

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<sup>2</sup> National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, p. 113. (2019). *2019 Annual Disability Statistics Supplement*, p. 113 (Table 3.22). <https://disabilitycompendium.org/>

Disability Rights Oregon is committed to ensuring the civil rights of all people are protected and enforced.

Sincerely,



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Attachments:

- Proposed Amendments to HB 2949

Requested by Disability Rights Oregon

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO  
HOUSE BILL 2949**

1 On page 1 of the printed bill, line 9, insert ", or individuals who are  
2 persons with a disability."

3 On page 3, line 39, delete "(B) Three members who are mental health  
4 professionals or consumers of mental health services or who advocate for  
5 consumers of mental health services" and insert "(B) One member who is a  
6 mental health professional. (C) Two members who are consumers of  
7 mental health services or who advocate for consumers of mental health  
8 services."

9 In line 43, delete "(B) Three members who are mental health  
10 professionals or consumers of mental health services or who advocate for  
11 consumers of mental health services" and insert "(B) One member who is a  
12 mental health professional. (C) Two members who are consumers of  
13 mental health services or who advocate for consumers of mental health  
14 services."

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