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April 04, 2021

Attn: Representative Janelle Bynum

Re: Affirming HB 2949 for BIPOC Mental Health Support

To our Oregon District 51 Representative, the distinguished Janelle Bynum,

As a collective of diverse and dedicated mental health providers, we enthusiastically support House Bill 2949 as legislation that will improve the access, quality, and opportunities in mental health for all our community but especially BIPOC clinicians and participants of services.

Our current mental health system needs corrective measures. This work is not done well without BIPOC clinicians thriving at all levels of this industry. Their cultural knowledge, experience, language, and leadership are needed strengths in delivering services. However, instead of advancing into the field and into positions of influence, under present conditions, BIPOC mental health providers shoulder economic disparities, unfounded stigma, and oppressive professional trajectories. They are overworked, under-resourced, exhausted, and many have been faced with the anguish of having to leave the industry because of the emotional, physical, and financial toll it has taken on their health and well-being. Removing the unnecessary hurdles and outdated standards that this bill proposes would allow greater BIPOC provider representation, get them into the workforce faster, reduce student loans quicker, increase earning potential, and build generational wealth which could lead to more access to education, better maternal/fetal outcomes, fewer health conditions, and greater opportunities for leadership among systems that very much need BIPOC vision and experience. For clients, having flourishing BIPOC clinicians would bring them access to better care, more sustainable treatment, and fewer displacements through the mental health system, leading to faster progress, increased resiliency, and lower long-term costs. This bill is life-changing and industry-improving!

The current standards do not in fact improve the quality of care participants receive from clinicians. They merely maintain a deeply flawed system that perpetuates barriers to care and dependence on treatment options that fail to respond adequately to diverse, cultural priorities. Amending these standards for clinicians is an impactful way to become current and reflect progress, need, and standards that more closely resemble other professionals in the field, such as social workers. We are in support of the following critical changes, proposed in this bill:

- **Licensure:** Reduce direct hours of LPC and LMFT therapists from 2,400 to 1,200. While this is a significant shift, it is not exceptional in the field of mental health. Social workers, who receive less education, training, and experience than the present standards for LPCs and LMFTs are fully qualified and considered competent for the mental health and medical field. This reduction in hours would rectify this disparity. It is also our position that more hours in a ~~broken~~ deeply inequitable system persistently lacking in cultural diversity and competency does not equate to better care or greater professionalism. Using this bill to help create a better system for training young professionals would allow for a more efficient pathway that equates to better outcomes and practices in providers.

- **BIPOC Mental Health Workforce Fund:** \$40 million fund to improve BIPOC mental health workforce development activities. We support this endeavor for creating a better system, with accountability on work environments.
- **Student Loan Forgiveness:** Student loan forgiveness for up to \$15,000 for mental health professionals in exchange for practicing 24 months in a qualified setting.
- **Mental Health Relief Fund:** Create a mental health relief fund for the formerly incarcerated to utilize \$10 million to fund counties, community mental health programs, and transition groups.
- **Cover Supervision Costs:** A fund of \$5 million to cover the supervision cost of any mental health practitioner in private practice. We support this with priority to BIPOC providers.
- **Employer Paid Supervision:** Mandates all employers of mental health workers cover supervision costs.
- **BIPOC Mental Health Fund:** Funding for BIPOC communities to have access to mental health care, including grants for members of our undocumented community.
- **Change Licensing Titles:** Changes the title of LPC & LMFT clinicians working towards licensure from “intern” to “associate.” Our entire profession and industry raises its professionalism with this title change. It is misleading and confusing to maintain the term “intern” for graduate-level pre-licensed professionals. Oregon has fallen behind in not yet advancing with best practices that many other states consistently maintain.
- **Insurance Billing:** Allows for licensed mental health associates to bill insurance. Our practice takes insurance and works to provide services without it. Our posture is to create better access for the community to receive mental health support. We are in favor of associates being able to bill insurance under the correct supervision and instruction. We also advise this bill compel insurance companies to conduct user-friendly trainings to providers, including associates, on their standards of documentation, claim submission, and protocols.
- **Reduce Barriers to Licensure:** The creation of a task force to examine loosening restrictions upon mental health licensing for formerly incarcerated people.

Thank you for acting with power and perseverance. Thank you for pursuing initiatives that will improve the lives of our community together by uplifting the value, resources, and opportunities in mental health for both clinicians and participants of color. We are with you and for you in this endeavor.

We call on all elected representatives, mental health providers, the Oregon Board of Licensed Professional Counselors and Therapists, professional mental health membership associations, educational institutions training mental health providers, organizations that employ clinicians, agencies offering mental health services, and all Oregon citizens invested in better, more equitable wellbeing for one another to speak up in support of advancing this bill.

Our group can be reached for any additional support through our contact, Kelly Grace, owner and therapist of Second Growth Counseling, at 503-549-4714 or [kelly@secondgrowth.com](mailto:kelly@secondgrowth.com).

In service together,

The Second Growth Counseling Team



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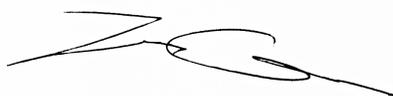
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