Honorable Representatives,

My name is Teressa Morris. I am a full-time fourth-year student at Oregon State University, majoring in Psychology. I live in Sutherlin, in Douglas County.

I am writing to you in support of HB 4004, which requires the Oregon Health Authority to distribute grants to behavioral health treatment providers for staff compensation and workforce retention and recruitment.

As of 2020, which is the most recent statistical data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the 90th percentile of behavioral health care in the United States was a ratio of 270 patients to 1 provider, or better. In Oregon, on average, we have a ratio of 180 patients to 1 provider. That statistic sounds really good, except that the more rural, less populous counties, such as mine, Douglas County, have ratios ranging from 340 to 640 patients to 1 provider.

And this data is from 2020. In Roseburg alone, we have had such a high turnover of mental health care professionals that at one time there was one provider covering over 1,000 patients. My son and I are all under the care of mental health providers. My son also has a substance use disorder. I have major depressive disorder and PTSD. My mental health provider moved on in 2020. The practice I go to couldn't find anyone local, so they contracted with a psychiatric nurse practitioner to consult by Zoom, which was okay, but not very personal. Then that provider moved on. I have been without psychiatric care since October 2021. My primary care provider is prescribing my psychiatric meds at this time, which is not ideal.

My son's psychiatrist also left in 2020. As a result, that practice was left with only one psychiatrist who had over 1,000 patients under his care. This meant prescriptions and messages were often lost or forgotten. That practitioner retired last month. Fortunately, my son only had to wait a month before the practice hired two psychiatric nurse practitoners.

Honestly, there are so many facets to this problem, where affordable housing is virtually nonexistent, waiting lists for rental assistance are over 2 years long, and behavioral health counselors make barely over minimum wage. HB 4004 would go a long way toward helping practices, especially those in poor, rural counties, to attract and keep the talented staff they and their patients desperately need.

HB 4004 would assist providers by providing grants to:

- Increase compensation for the behavioral health provider's staff, which would make it easier for staff to find a place to live or at least make their commute from Lane or Josephine County worth it.
- Pay a retention bonus to a staff person if necessary to prevent the staff person from leaving the provider's employ, which would again, make it easier for staff to afford to stay put.
- Hire new staff, which would hopefully make it easier for patients to meet with their behavioral health providers locally, rather than by Zoom.

In short, I strongly urge you to pass HB 4004.

Thank you for the opportunity to give my opinion on this important subject,

Teressa Morris