



February 3, 2021  
House Committee on Behavioral Health  
RE: Support for HB 4004

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Moore-Green, Reynolds, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 4004. APANO, PCUN, and Family Forward have recently come together as a newly formed coalition to create an effective mental health advocacy campaign across our three diverse organizations. Collectively, we organize mothers, caregivers, refugees, farmworkers and immigrants who have always lacked reliable access to both physical and mental health care services. As a result of increasing hate crimes, incidents of racial violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic recession, we continue to see our communities' elevated need for mental health care support services.

As many of our community members have been suffering without adequate access to mental and behavioral health care, behavioral health providers have also been in crisis, way before the COVID-19 pandemic. Oregon's behavioral health workforce is overworked and burnt out, has stagnant and low pay with poor benefits, and is drowning in student loan debt. During a time where BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) mental health care providers are needed more than ever by the community, fewer than one-in-five mental health care providers in Oregon are BIPOC. Black care providers make up less than 1% of each type of mental health focus—including Black psychologists, therapists and counselors—while Black Oregonians make up 2.2% of the state's population.<sup>1</sup>

Last legislative session, our mental health coalition supported HB 2949 which provides incentives and grants to increase recruitment and retention of people of color, tribal members, and residents of rural areas into the behavioral health workforce, in order to provide culturally responsive care. Our coalition is currently participating in Oregon Health Authority's Behavioral Health Community Leadership Council to guide HB 2949's implementation and ensure that funding is allocated equitably. Although we are working quickly, behavioral health providers are in need of immediate assistance, which is why we support HB 4004.

HB 4004 establishes a grant program available to providers of behavioral health services who serve Oregon's publicly funded system. Grants can be used to temporarily increase wages for providers, offer retention bonuses, and improve working conditions, like offering schedule flexibility or additional PTO. Long term, our coalition believes that one of the ways we can improve the behavioral health workforce crisis is to develop new behavioral health provider

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.wweek.com/news/2020/09/23/black-mental-health-care-providers-are-greatly-underrepresented-in-oregon/>

rates that accurately reflect the training and education of providers. In addition, it is critical that we intentionally retain and recruit more behavioral health providers who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color so that our workforce truly represents Oregon.

The lack of access to comprehensive, sufficient, affordable, and culturally responsive mental health care is glaringly obvious for BIPOC individuals, mothers, caregivers, farmworkers, immigrants, and refugees. While we work to address better mental health accessibility for our communities, we must also continue to invest in Oregon's behavioral health workforce. **We urge you to vote “YES” on HB 4004.**

Sincerely,

Lisa Kwon, Policy Manager, Family Forward Oregon

Daysi Bedolla, Organizing Director, PCUN

Coua Xiong, Interim Advocacy and Civic Engagement Director, APANO