

February 3, 2022

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health

Dear Committee,

We are writing to support HB 4004 to ensure adequate staffing for behavioral health treatment facilities and residential behavioral health facilities. We are Chair and Vice-Chair of the Oregon Residential Ombudsman and Public Guardian Advisory Board (a volunteer citizen board tasked to oversee and advocate on behalf of the Residential Facilities Ombudsman, RFO, and Public Guardian, OPG, programs) though are submitting this letter of support as private citizens who work in the medical and mental health fields, not as a representation of official messaging of this Advisory Board.

The COVID pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing workforce shortages in behavioral health treatment and residential facilities. These shortages have had profound negative consequences for Oregonians with severe mental health illness requiring treatment and safe residential settings. As members of ROPGAB, we have been hearing about the exploding crisis faced by OPG and the RFO. Many OPG clients with mental health disorders languish (at great cost to the state) in the state hospital or cycle through the jail system even after they are appointed a Public Guardian to support them because of the lack of safe residential options for them. And too many of the Oregonians RFO seeks to protect and advocate for are having to move from their longstanding home or, worse yet, being served move-out notices due to residential behavioral health facilities lack of trained staff. These problems have been growing throughout the pandemic.

Greater investment by the state to support the recruitment and retention of behavioral health providers and staff can ultimately save the state in state hospital, criminal justice, jail costs, and save Oregonians in residential facilities from the tremendous destabilization wrought by staffing shortages.

Please support HB4004.

Thank you,



Helen Kao, MD  
Chair, ROPGAB



Dwight Mowry, PhD  
Vice Chair, ROPGAB