

Mental Health Alliance

February 10, 2023

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, Vice-Chair Nelson, and members of the committee:

We write in strong support of HB 2445, which provides additional paths for certification of addiction peer support specialists.

Peer support workers are critically important to individual recovery, and to the function of the behavioral health care system as a whole. Peers provide highly effective, low-cost support for individuals at the critical but underappreciated stage of prevention and ongoing management. Academic research going back decades has demonstrated that peer support is just as helpful for a patient as clinical intervention in many circumstances.

Oregon has a lot of people struggling with addiction, and not enough people to help them recover. Under these circumstances, we should be making every effort to increase the supply of peer support specialists. HB 2445 will help this effort by alleviating a certification bottleneck at the Oregon Health Authority.

HB 2445 will also direct licensing entities to use ORS 443.004 (5) as a standard for certification criminal background checks, limiting the criminal checks to serious violent felonies. We strongly support this effort to end the administrative perversity of denying a peer drug counselor certification on the grounds of prior criminal drug use.

In the future, we hope this committee will limit criminal background checks for all peer support workers to serious felonies, to avoid screening out applicants for minor convictions that are a common outcome of untreated mental illness and addiction.

Members of the Mental Health Alliance legislative work group include ~

Beckie Child, PhD - Professor of social work at Utica University
Aimee Sukol, JD MA MS Ed - Principal at Sukol Venture Consulting
KC Lewis, JD - former Managing Attorney at Disability Rights Oregon
Eben Hoffer - Legislative Lead at the Mental Health Alliance
Jason Renaud - Secretary at the Mental Health Association of Portland
Amanda S. Marshall, JD - family law & civil commitment attorney
Bob Joondeph, JD - former Executive Director at Disability Rights Oregon