



February 20, 2023

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

Thank you for considering this testimony in support of Senate Bill 624. My name is Emerson Hamlin, and I am a political organizer for the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). ONA is a nurse's union and professional association representing over 15,000 health care workers and providers, including registered nurses, advanced practice nurses, and allied health workers. Our members work in urban and rural hospitals, clinics, school-based health centers, home health, and county health departments across Oregon.

Our nurses continually report being overwhelmed by the number of patients experiencing mental and behavioral health crises. This is true for our members who work specifically in behavioral and mental health care, but it is also true for our nurses who do not hold such specializations, and who are working in emergency rooms and hospitals across our state. Our nurses do their best to serve all patients and provide them with the resources they need, but they consistently tell us that there are simply not enough supports for patients who need mental and behavioral health care. Certified community behavioral health clinics are part of the solution: in the final report to evaluate CCBHC effectiveness, OHA, OSHU and Portland State University School of Public Health found that the program increased access to behavioral health treatment for residents statewide by 4.3% overall.<sup>1</sup> Oregonians in rural and remote areas saw considerably more increases in access, at 23.4% and 18.3%, respectively. The same report found that increased access to care provided by CCBHCs led to a significant reduction of emergency department and inpatient utilization, helping clients avoid serious crises and supporting them without removing them from their daily lives. Simultaneously, by providing these services within communities across Oregon, CCBHCs are reducing stress on our already overwhelmed hospital systems.

ONA members strongly believe that everyone deserves access to the care they need when they need it. Our nurses do all they can for their patients, but they are repeatedly experiencing the ways in which our health care system is failing Oregonians, especially those experiencing mental and behavioral health challenges. CCBHCs are already providing services to those who need them most, in their own communities, and we feel strongly that increasing support to CCBHCs will bolster individual health and the capacity of our hospital and urgent care systems. ONA urges support for SB 624.

Sincerely,

Emerson Hamlin

Political Organizer at Oregon Nurses Association

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<sup>1</sup>Oregon Health Authority, OHSU, Portland State University School of Public Health. (2023). *Evaluation of the Oregon Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) Program: Final Report*.