

Submitter: Sarah Barrett

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2455

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Dear Chair Nosse and Members of the House Committee of Behavioral Health and Health Care,

My name is Sarah Barrett. I'm a Licensed Professional Counselor with my own private practice where I support adults in healing from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. I live in Astoria, and provide services via telehealth to residents of Clatsop County and beyond. I've been working as a therapist since 2015, which has also included time at a dual diagnosis treatment facility in downtown Portland and as part of a group practice. I am writing to ask that you support the passage of HB 2455.

I worked as a member of a group practice from 2019 to the start of 2022, and while there, I was contracted with six of the most prominent insurance companies in the state. As the pandemic did for most people, I evaluated my priorities for my family and decided to move to Astoria. I opened my own private practice in April of 2022. One of the most important decisions I considered was which insurance companies I wanted to continue to contract with in my private practice. Toward the end of my time at the group practice I received a letter from Change Healthcare, an organization that Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon contracts with to monitor and audit therapists. The letter informed me that my billing frequency of 90837, which is a 53 minute or longer session, was higher than other providers in my area. As my specialty is treating trauma, 53 minute or longer sessions are frequently medically necessary due to the amount of time required for a client to both feel safe enough to process trauma and then repack what was discussed in session. The threat of a potential audit from Regence BlueCross BlueShield was enough of a reason for me to not pursue a contract with them, and also lead to my decision to pursue only one contract with an insurance company in my private practice. This meant that most of my long-term clients were unable to continue to see me, and the ones that did continue with me now must pay a significant fee for out-of-network services.

As a small business owner and primary breadwinner for my family, the financial security of my business is crucial, and also an ongoing source of stress and anxiety for me. The fact that currently insurance audits allow companies to go back 30 months is frankly scary, and I know my small business couldn't financially cope with a large recoupment request. While I am confident in my note taking and clinical care, the very possibility of a large recoupment is too much of a risk for me to tolerate - hence why I only work with one insurance company presently. HB 2455 would limit the amount of time an insurance company could go back to 12 months, which is a more reasonable amount of time and something that small private practices like mine could cope with better.

The other reason I ask for your support for the passage of HB 2455 is to help increase access to mental health care. As I've already mentioned,, I've considerably restricted the amount of insurance companies I work with in order to mitigate my own exposure to and fear of insurance company audit practices. I'm well aware that the people this choice harms most at the end of the day are the multitude of Oregonians trying to access mental health services. The fact that Oregon continues to rank 49/50 in terms of access to care for mental health services in this country is unacceptable. Passing HB 2455 would directly address this problem, particularly in counties like Clatsop that are already experiencing a dearth in available providers and resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sarah Barrett, LPC, CADCI, CCTP
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