

Submitter: CJ Alicandro

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human
Services

Measure: SB5525

Dear Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services,

My name is CJ Alicandro, I use they/them pronouns, and I am Vice President of AFSCME Local 1790 which represents the employees of Cascadia Health, Outside In, Janus Youth, Volunteers of America, FORA Health, among others. I have worked as a social worker in residential treatment and crisis response for a decade.

I appreciate the attention that the Oregon legislature has given to improving our state's behavioral and mental health services over the past decade. The workforce retention funding, specifically, has led to positive outcomes for myself and the mental health professionals I work with. Today, I just want to highlight a few parts of the Governor's Recommend Budget that are important to me:

First is the Oregon Behavioral Health Coordinator Center designed to coordinate the availability of behavioral health residential beds. As someone who was worked in secured residential treatment for years, I can share many stories about clients who were "stuck," not because of their behaviors, but simply because there wasn't another place for them to go. Anything we can do to help streamline the process for getting people moved from higher levels of care such as Oregon State Hospital/local hospitals/secured treatment is urgently needed.

Secondly, I want to highlight general behavioral health facility investments. Expanding and improving the acute psychiatric facilities and recovery centers we have is cheaper than building entire new ones and leads to more effective outcomes for our community members. It would do a lot to address the growing need we have to address the humanitarian crisis of mental illness existing in our state.

I understand that the committee will be hearing many requests this session and there are many worthwhile funding requests which will have to be tabled. I just think it is important to consider how stable mental health underpins every facet of a working society from healthcare to business to education, even transit. Having a social safety net to catch us when we're struggling is one of the cornerstones of building a healthy state. Thank you for your time and all the continued efforts you're putting into helping our communities move towards improved mental health.

- CJ Alicandro

