

Submitter: Jim Davis  
On Behalf Of: Or St Cn for Retired Citizens-United Seniors-OCL  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure: SB5506

I'm Dr. Jim Davis representing United Seniors of Oregon, Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens, and the Oregon Consumer League. I want to express our strong support for Oregon's nationally-acclaimed senior and disability services system and to highlight their preventative community-based mental health services.

For 4 decades, Oregon has built a senior and disability service system that is considered a national model for in-home and community-based care, providing the most independent living environment for seniors and persons with disabilities through community-based "continuum of care" options that helps respond to the physical and emotional problems of seniors and people with disabilities, allowing them to remain in their own communities and live independent lives. It has saved the state hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs related to hospitalization and institutionalization.

We support the Governor's Budget recommendations that maintain important statewide and local senior and disabled services. We hope the Legislature will continue to make funding of senior and disability services a top priority.

We want to also strongly emphasize our support for senior and disability behavioral health and the APD/ODHS senior-disability preventive behavioral health services.

Advocates have fought very hard for this limited amount of APD/ODHS funding for preventative mental health issues that has been a cost-effective vehicle that helps keep seniors and people with disabilities safer and emotionally healthier within a supportive environment. The program emphasizes creative community and facility approaches for behavioral health within the senior and disability communities, including innovative programs such as the HOPE, PEARLS, and Healing Pathways. There is a strong partnership in the local communities between the area agencies on aging and disabilities, the Centers for Independent Living and local Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs).

Seniors and people with disabilities are at high risk of developing behavioral health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, obsessive concerns about health, and mild paranoia, often exacerbated by the effects of complex medical problems, multiple medications and the use and abuse of alcohol and prescription medications. The public and private mental health systems have ignored the special mental health and addiction needs of the senior and disability communities, with even greater hurdles experienced by older ethnic and cultural populations.

Elders and people with disabilities continue to face on-going and significant barriers to accessing appropriate behavioral health treatment and other services. It is nearly impossible for an APD/DHS Medicaid client, whether in-home or in community-based facilities, to access community-based Medicaid mental health and addiction services, or for that matter an OHA/OHP client to access APD/DHS long term care services. Based on a 2021 Budget Note, the Oregon Health Authority and the Department of Human Resources reported to the 2022 Legislature on implementing systematic, programmatic and policy changes with the goal of creating a more seamless path for Aging and People with Disabilities/DHS clients to access mental health and drug and alcohol treatment services from OHA and long term services and supports from ODHS simultaneously without interruption of services and supports from either agency or system. Advocates are wondering what next steps are being taken by the Legislature to create a path to services for seniors and people with disabilities suffering from behavioral health problems.

We urge you to support the maintenance and expansion of Aging and People with Disabilities/DHS services and the APD/DHS senior-disability preventive behavioral health program.