

**Representative Hai Pham, DMD**  
**House District 36**



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Friday, May 5th, 2023**

Dear Co-Chair Steiner, Co-Chair Sanchez and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means,

I am writing today to **share my strong support of [HB 2977A](#)**, a bill that will provide much-needed investments into our behavioral health workforce.

**Oregon is in the midst of a behavioral health crisis.** The need for behavioral health providers has skyrocketed in the past decade, but our current workforce has been unable to meet the needs of our communities due to higher caseloads and burnout.

To alleviate the crisis we are in, we must create guided pathways through college and university programs to educate and motivate individuals to join the behavioral health field.

Our regional workforce boards can also develop sustainable partnerships with education and workforce programs to incentivize and keep providers in the field.

HB 2977A would do just this, and address issues within the state's behavioral health workforce by **incentivizing more BIPOC and rural behavioral health providers to join and stay in the field.**

This bill allocates \$5 million to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to distribute grants to higher education institutions and organizations to develop training and instructional programs to prepare students to enter into the behavioral health workforce. An additional \$5 million will be allocated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) and State Workforce and Talent Development Boards to distribute grants to local workforce development boards that provide workforce programs and promote workforce development in behavioral health. The bill will also track funding allocations and require OHA to report how the funds are used.

And finally, HB 2977A would create an oversight council to advise OHA in identifying and eliminating systemic barriers that influence funding allocations and behavioral health workforce policy. To clarify, this oversight council does not evaluate funds as distributed by HB 2977A, rather, it evaluates funds as distributed in future allocations through the Behavioral Health Subaccount (such as through [HB 2651A](#) which is also up for consideration this session in the Joint Ways & Means Committee).

[HB 2651A](#) is paired with HB 2977A as the “Thrive Act” and it would build upon the framework of [HB 2949](#) (from the 2021 session) to further support the recruitment and retention of our state’s behavioral health workforce.

I had the honor of working on this bill in **collaboration with Washington County and Rep. Janelle Bynum’s office.** And as you will see from the public hearing and other submitted support testimony, this is a bipartisan effort to address the critical behavioral health needs of Oregonians by supporting and investing in our providers.

**I urge the committee’s support of HB 2977A this session. Please fund this important investment!**

Sincerely,

**Representative Hai Pham, DMD**