



EVE GRAY

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DATE: February 1, 2023
TO: Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee
RE: Behavioral and Public Health Workforce Package

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding today's public hearing on a suite of bills that could provide real solutions for the workforce issues in the field of behavioral and public health services. I urge the Committee to continue honing these bills such that they continue a path towards Governor Kotek's desk for signature.

Perhaps the most important dynamic the Committee should understand from my perspective is that Oregon needs to continue to invest in behavioral and public health service delivery writ large, but that no amount of investment will work effectively without the workforce necessary to operate what is a very complex framework of prevention, intervention, treatment, and supports that all must work in concert. On the behavioral and mental health side of the equation, the singular aim is to help those individuals in our society who suffer from mental health illnesses or struggle with behavioral health issues to be better able to integrate into community life. And on the public health side, our aim is to increase overall wellness in our communities, ideally focusing on preventing health impacts before they debilitate our communities.

I provide the following comments on the bills most important to me from today's hearing:

HB 2977

This measure will create a pipeline to employment by making investments primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions, as well as local workforce boards that will improve pathways to employment. Notably it creates a longer term structure to continuously analyze and troubleshoot both policy and fiscal side issues affecting the Behavioral Health Workforce. I urge the Committee to support this measure.

HB 2652

This measure builds on the successes of HB 4004 (2022) to continue the ability of employers to offer hiring and retention bonuses that enhance recruitment efforts. It adds a requirement that county governing bodies can only access the resources made available under this measure if they can identify the presence of a workforce crisis. The measure is technical in nature, and I am engaged with the authors to ensure we have those details ironed out. I urge the Committee to support the amendment process currently underway in order to have it return for the Committee in work session.

HB 2773

Similar to HB 2652, this measure will enhance entry into the field of Public Health and retain those employees already in this field. The State has notably reformed public health policy under the heading of public health modernization and continues to invest in public health infrastructure. To my earlier point, those policy and fiscal resources cannot reach their zenith without a robust workforce. Much of this work involves face to face interactions to ensure we fully recover from the pandemic, while being able to respond to health issues like opioid abuse or to respond to the new challenges we are experiencing from climate related impacts.