



Written Testimony in Support of HB 2024

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Affiliation: Mental Health Champion for The Oregon Heals Coalition

Date: March 25, 2025

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Javadi and Nelson, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written testimony in support of the -2 amendment to HB 2024. My name is Diana Nguyen, and I am a public health graduate student with a commitment to patient advocacy and raising health equity. I am a Mental Health Champion for the Oregon Heals Coalition, an alliance of advocacy organizations working together to achieve a robust mental health system in Oregon that is equitable, affordable, culturally responsive, and adequately serves those who have historically experienced the least access. This year, we built our 2025 Legislative Agenda in partnership with the community and determined HB 2024 would gain our support as one of our priorities.

Oregon's behavioral health system is facing a workforce crisis and does not have the capacity to serve our communities. This is especially concerning as Oregon has consistently ranked high nationally in percentage of people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders, but also low-to-last in terms of access to mental health services due to the number of people who need behavioral services and do not receive it¹.

Through my experiences working in Oregon's behavioral health system, I have witnessed and experienced many challenges staying in the profession. Because of workforce turnover, Oregonians are unable to receive timely behavioral health services and this is especially harder for individuals seeking providers who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The behavioral health workers are burnt out and do not get paid enough despite the high caseload and responsibilities placed on them. It is unsurprising that a system that does not protect and support its workers is unable to keep a robust network of health professionals. Oregon needs to

¹ 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) Releases – <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/data-we-collect/nsduh-national-survey-drug-use-and-health/national-releases/2021>



make efforts to invest in the behavioral health workforce through retention and recruitment initiatives, such as those proposed in the HB 2024 amendments, so that all Oregonian patients are able to receive timely, easily-accessible, and high-quality behavioral health services from talented and dedicated health professionals.

This HB 2024 amendment is a critical step toward stabilizing our workforce by providing:

- Scholarships and tuition assistance for future providers
- Loan forgiveness and repayment incentives
- Housing assistance
- Wage increases and retention bonuses
- Child care support
- Professional development opportunities

I urge you to **vote “YES” on the amendment of HB 2024** to ensure people providing the critical services our communities need are able to afford to stay in this profession and continue making a difference in our communities.

Thank you for considering my testimony,

Diana Nguyen

The Oregon Heals Coalition

