



To: The House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

From: Oregon Heals Coalition

Date: March 25, 2025

Re: In Support of House Bills 2203 & 2024

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Javadi, Vice-Chair Nelson, and members of the committee,

Oregon's behavioral health needs have worsened dramatically since the start of COVID-19 and were already in crisis well before then. In fact, Oregon ranks 49th in the country for access to mental health services. Our current system is not adequately serving our communities, especially Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC), who often experience the most stigma when trying to access care and the greatest barriers to receiving it. By supporting the vital workers who provide quality care across the state, you are improving health outcomes for countless Oregonians.

The Oregon Heals Coalition envisions a robust mental health system that is equitable, affordable, culturally responsive, community-centered, and community-driven. It is essential that we create a system that works for all Oregonians and that adequately serves those who have historically been most impacted by structural inequities.

This year, the Oregon Heals Coalition developed our 2025 Legislative Agenda in partnership with the community. We identified HB 2203 and HB 2024 as



key priorities because they seek to stabilize the workforce that is at the heart of this system. Behavioral health workers face innumerable obstacles that all lead to high turnover rates. Student loan debt, low wages, high and complex caseloads, lack of support at their facilities, unsafe working conditions, and much more.

HB 2203 takes much-needed steps to improve workplace safety for behavioral health workers—many of whom are BIPOC providers delivering culturally specific and trauma-informed care. This bill requires safety plans, risk assessments, and expanded training to protect workers from harm. It also offers grants to conduct risk assessments and invest in safety improvements in community-based behavioral health facilities, which often operate with limited resources.

HB 2024 seeks to stabilize the 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, and professional development opportunities. These are exactly the kinds of investments that will keep providers in the field, and over time, lessen workforce shortages.

Oregon's growing demand for behavioral health care cannot be met without addressing the health, safety, and sustainability of the workforce that provides it. Supporting and protecting this workforce will create a stable foundation to better serve our most impacted communities and strengthen Oregon's mental health system overall.



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COALITION

Please join us in supporting legislation that positively impacts Black, Indigenous, and other Oregonians of color. **Oregon Heals strongly urges your “YES” vote on HB 2203 and 2024.**

Sincerely,

The Oregon Heals Coalition

