

March 25, 2025

To: House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

Re: Support for House Bill 2024-3

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

Thank you for the opportunity to share Multnomah County's support for HB 2024-3, which increases workforce recruitment and retention through proven strategies, including workforce development, worker incentives, and increased provider rates. Growing Oregon's statewide behavioral health workforce is listed as a priority on [Multnomah County's 2025 legislative agenda](#); we recognize that in order to provide higher quality, equitable health services for all Oregonians, critical investments are needed throughout the pipeline of Oregon's behavioral health system. This includes increasing and supporting the public behavioral health provider workforce, and building a system that is sustainable for years to come.

Access to high-quality behavioral health care depends on a strong, stable workforce. However, providers serving individuals with the highest and most acute needs struggle to compete with the private sector, leading to chronic staffing shortages that undermine care. A recent survey of CMHPs statewide revealed a 17% vacancy rate of positions overall and this number jumps to a staggering 29% for crisis service workers. We know that investments in the workforce work; an Oregon Council for Behavioral Health survey of providers determined that after the 2022 and 2023 legislative investments, open positions reduced by an average of 40%.

HB 2024 prioritizes three components to bolster Oregon's public behavioral health workforce:

1. Incentivizing work in the public system. In alignment with the Governor's Recommended Budget, HB 2024-3 allocates \$20 million to the Oregon Health Authority to establish a Workforce Incentive Grant Program. These grants will allow organizational providers to offer meaningful workforce supports—including housing stipends, tuition assistance, child care subsidies, and other incentives—to attract and retain qualified professionals. By directly addressing the financial and logistical barriers that often drive behavioral health workers to private-sector roles, this program will strengthen the public system's ability to provide consistent, high-quality care to Oregon's most vulnerable populations.
2. Increasing wages for those serving individuals with the most acute need. Right now in our system, workers providing care for people with the most complex needs are paid the least. Providers often leave organizations that provide treatment to high-acuity individuals to enter private practice where they can make more money and work fewer hours. Increasing reimbursement for workers who provide outpatient services like street outreach and medication-assisted treatment as well as residential services is key to retaining these workers in the public behavioral health system. HB 2024-3 provides \$20 million to OHA for a targeted reimbursement increase via incentive payment for these providers so workers are able to stay where communities need them most, serving the Oregonians who need it most.

3. Providing opportunities for training and apprenticeship. The United We Heal Labor Management Trust offers participating providers access to enhanced apprenticeship and training programs while leveraging federal matching funds. These programs help attract new individuals into the behavioral health system while also providing opportunities for career advancement for those seeking a higher level certification. HB 2024-3 allocates \$5 million to United We Heal to expand access to the trust.

These critical investments will improve outcomes for Oregonians in need of mental health and substance use care, and ensure a sustainable future for public behavioral health services. We request your support for HB 2024-3.

Sincerely,

Lizzy Atwood Wills
State Coordinator, Government Relations
Multnomah County