

March 25, 2025

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Javadi and Nelson, and Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of **Innovation Law Lab** in support of HB 2203 and HB 2024 to support behavioral health services and workers. Innovation Law Lab is an organization of lawyers, coders and advocates working to advance immigrant and refugee justice.

Our behavioral health system can better support both workers and patients, especially those who rely on OHP for care. Facilities are often dangerously understaffed, forcing workers to handle high-risk situations alone. Rural communities often have few or no providers.

People of color struggle to find care that meets their needs and understands their experiences. As of 2020, **just 4.7%** of Oregon's behavioral health workforce identified as Hispanic or Latino, compared to about **14%** of the state's population that year, according to the [Oregon Health Authority](#). Other populations were also under-represented. Just 1.3% of behavioral health workers were Black compared to 2.3% of Oregonians. We're losing experienced professionals every day because they can't make ends meet or stay safe at work.

**The behavioral healthcare workforce faces several challenges including:**

- Chronically unsafe work environments
- Overwork and burnout which leads to increased risk and staffing shortages
- Insufficient security presence
- Systemic safety issues

HB 2203 makes important improvements to our Behavioral Health system by acting on the recommendations of the Joint Task Force on Improving the Safety of Behavioral Health Workers. **HB 2024** invests \$45M into strengthening and diversifying our behavioral health workforce. It also provides \$20 million to OHA for a targeted reimbursement increase via incentive payments for these providers. Such payments will enable workers to stay where communities need them most, serving the Oregonians who need it most. It will also provide training and career advancement opportunities.

These are critical services and we ask that you support HB 2203 and HB 2024.

Thank you,

Isa Peña - Director of Strategy, Innovation Law Lab