



Comments in Support: Senate Bill 1547

From Chris Bouneff, Executive Director, NAMI Oregon

February 4, 2026

Senate Early Childhood and Behavioral Health Committee

NAMI Oregon wishes to express its enthusiastic support for SB 1547, which would establish a license for a Behavioral Health and Wellness Practitioner under the Mental Health Regulatory Agency.

As background, NAMI Oregon is a grassroots, membership-governed organization. Our membership is almost entirely composed of individuals who live with mental health disorders, family members with loved ones living with disorders, or parents/caregivers raising children living with behavioral health issues. Many of us check multiple boxes. With our 17 local chapters, we annually serve more than 15,000 Oregonians through our free education, support, and awareness programs.

Oregon's struggles with meeting the behavioral health needs of our youth are well-documented. Less known is Oregon's reliance on unlicensed practitioners as entry-level staff working directly with Oregon's youth with such needs.

The lack of professional standards and training for this unlicensed workforce encourages uneven and substandard care. Youth who sometimes have very complex needs are exposed to practitioners who may or may not have pertinent academic qualifications. This workforce has no real scope, has never demonstrated any level of mastery prior to entry, and often lacks the knowledge needed to adequately serve today's youth.

This may have been acceptable in historic days when behavioral health was an afterthought in Oregon's health care delivery system. But this no longer should be tolerable today when we have expanded coverage and better understand the important role that behavioral health services play in our state, particularly among youth.

SB 1547 advances Oregon into the modern age. The new license creates a cadre of bachelor's level, prevention-focused providers who are rigorously trained and who receive more than 700 hours of supervision before fully entering the workforce. This is a qualified workforce with the background and experience to make an immediate impact in settings such as schools and our network of youth-serving behavioral health provider agencies.

Having a bachelor's level entry point strengthens and diversifies Oregon's behavioral health workforce and creates a formal pathway for further professional development for those who wish to become master's level and doctoral-level clinicians, who are in short supply in Oregon. It creates a workforce pipeline that doesn't exist today.

NAMI Oregon cannot stress enough how important it is that Oregon do better for its youth if it's to make improvements across the lifespan. About half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and three-quarters, or 75 percent, by age 24. This is a critical age range where we will have the greatest impact if we can focus on prevention and introduce services closer to onset of symptoms.

We urge the committee's support for SB 1547 and thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.