



February 17, 2026

REMARKS AS PREPARED

First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson's HB 4083 Testimony to the Senate Committee on Behavioral Health

Good afternoon, Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the committee. My name is Aimee Kotek Wilson, and I am the First Lady of Oregon. Prior to becoming First Lady, I graduated with my MSW in 2017 and served high acuity clients as a social worker in the field.

As a former provider, I also have direct experience navigating the behavioral health education-to-credentialing-to-work continuum. I'm here today to testify in support of House Bill 4083, "Cutting Red Tape for Behavioral Health Workers," a bill that took shape from the work of the Behavioral Health Talent Council, which I'm honored to chair. You had a preview of this bill from some of the Council's leaders during last month's legislative days.

When I joined the Governor on her One Oregon Listening Tour in her first year, we met mental health and addiction care workers in various settings in every corner of our state. They all echoed that the workforce shortage was a crushing issue resulting in countless Oregonians unable to find care. This crisis hits hardest in rural communities and culturally specific communities, and in settings serving Oregon Health Plan members. Additionally, when professionals leave or positions don't get filled, the burden on remaining workers intensifies, creating a dangerous cycle of burnout and turnover.

We heard many stories about the workforce crisis. This bill, HB 4083, is grounded in actual examples from providers from across the state. Their voices shaped every action plan in the Council's final report. You heard from some of them in last month's hearing and will be hearing more today.



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After visiting every county, the Governor moved forward by directing the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to conduct a specific analysis of the workforce needs and gaps. The result was the Behavioral Health Talent Assessment, a report consolidating years of important but siloed and fragmented research into one comprehensive resource with over 60 evidence-based recommendations. The Governor then established the Behavioral Health Talent Council to transform those recommendations into actionable implementation plans.

Over the past eight months, our 22-member Council has worked tirelessly to develop comprehensive strategies addressing every stage of the workforce pipeline. The Council brought diverse expertise to the challenge: direct service providers, healthcare administrators, licensing authorities, agency staff, education leaders, frontline workers, workers across licensing types, and individuals with lived experience

In addition to the Council's meetings, the Governor's Office staff and I conducted 18 site visits; ten meetings with culturally specific providers; six roundtables with frontline workers, students, and stakeholders; and a coordination meeting with the sovereign tribes of Oregon. The Governor's team also maintained ongoing coordination with legislative workgroups with a focus on the behavioral health workforce to ensure their work and expertise would be reflected in the Council's final report.

This bill before you represent just a handful of the recommendations from the Council's work. These are solutions that providers told us they need now: streamlined Medicaid credentialing so qualified workers can start serving patients sooner, reduced administrative burden so providers can spend more time focused on clients, and expanded access to clinical supervision so providers can get critical mentorship to succeed and stay in their careers.



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Improving our behavioral health system is a sizable challenge. House Bill 4083, Cutting Red Tape for Behavioral Health Workers, is an important start, and the first of what we hope will be many actions from the Council's recommendations to help support and expand Oregon's behavioral health workforce. I urge your support. Thank you.