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House Committee on Behavioral Health

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Chair Pham, Vice Chair Edwards, Vice Chair Javadi, and all distinguished members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the regulation of mental health professionals in the state of Oregon. I am an Assistant Professor at West Virginia University and the Director of Labor Policy at the Knee Regulatory Research Center. I am also a Regulatory Policy Fellow with the Archbridge Institute. My comments are not submitted on behalf of any party or interest group.

My research focuses on the effects of occupational licensing laws on a range of outcomes, including access to care. Across the state of Oregon, patients experience difficulty accessing mental health services.¹

Creating a new mid-level mental health professional is a simple, effective solution to improve access to care. Licensed behavioral health and wellness practitioners would be able to deliver certain preventive services and brief mental health interventions without placing patients at risk.

The experience of other mid-level professionals can be instructive. Advanced Practice Registered Nurses have increased access to primary care, reducing wait times while delivering high-quality care for patients.² Licensed behavioral health and wellness practitioners could play a similar role by practicing in locations where other providers are scarce, helping more people receive the care they need.

Licensed behavioral health and wellness practitioners would be a valuable addition to the mental health team, a profession that allows more people to receive early-stage support, providing early-stage support and helping prevent mental health conditions from worsening.

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¹ Oregon Health Authority. (2024) "2024 Health Professional Shortage Area."
[/https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-PCO/Documents/HPSA-Mental-Health-Type-2024.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-PCO/Documents/HPSA-Mental-Health-Type-2024.pdf)

² Bae, K., Norris, C., Shakya, S., and Timmons, E. (2022). "How Full Practice Authority Can Increase Access and Improve Outcomes." Commonwealth Foundation Policy Brief.