

Health Department

Date February 4, 2020

TO: The Honorable Mitch Greenlick, Chair
House Committee on Behavioral Health

SUBJECT: HB 4031 Removes exemption from requirement to obtain licensure for persons providing certain counseling services

Chair Greenlick and members of the committee: I am Ebony Clarke, Director of Mental Health & Addiction Services at Multnomah County Health Department. I am here before you today to advocate for amending this bill language so that Multnomah County can support all three functions of this bill.

As the Local Mental Health Authority for Multnomah County, my organization is responsible for ensuring the provision of mental health care services to people experiencing mental illness in Oregon's largest metropolitan region. A thriving behavioral health workforce is central to our mission.

First, the removal of the exemption from the requirement to obtain licensure for certain behavioral health services would further burden the already strained workforce. This also may potentially limit the number of culturally responsive and culturally specific clinicians, who are critical in effectively serving a diverse population of people suffering from mental illness. We know that, according to MHACBO (Mental Health & Addiction Certification Board of Oregon), the unlicensed workforce is very diverse, with over 30% of certified QMHPs (Qualified Mental Health Professionals) identifying as a racial or ethnic minority in the Tri-County region. We have spoken before you all in the Capitol and other spaces on the limited availability of behavioral health clinicians to provide needed services in our County, region, and state. By removing this exemption, clinicians who have certifications such as, QMHAs (Qualified Mental Health Associates), QMHPs and CADC - (Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor) would not be able to practice certain behavioral health or counseling services. We would like to keep the exemption, or to see the bill language edited to include certifications so that the workforce would not further be impacted.

Second, while we support bill's proposed Behavioral Health Professional Workforce Assessment, we would like to see language included regarding using an equity lens in the review of studies, and an opportunity for communities of color to contribute feedback. This is an important part of assuring a diverse behavioral health workforce in

Testimony: Ebony Clarke, Multnomah County

the future, which is critical to be able to meet the growing needs of our diverse community of consumers. We know that we have a workforce crisis, and our hope is that an assessment will lead to actionable steps and changes so that we can adequately staff necessary programs to ensure all residents of Multnomah County and Oregon have access to behavioral health services.

Finally, we would like to thank the bill's authors for proposing the changes to more person-centered language in Section 3. Moving from outdated terms like "addict" helps us shift toward a more compassionate, less stigmatizing way of talking about substance use. This, in turn, helps the behavioral health system better support those who seek help.

At Multnomah County, improving the behavioral health system is a top priority. We want to be partners in supporting any legislation that will support individuals seeking behavioral health services.

Thank you, Chair Greenlick and committee members, for this opportunity to provide written testimony. I would be happy to be a resource if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ebony Sloan Clarke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ebony" being more prominent.

Ebony Sloan Clarke, LCSW, MSW
Interim Division Director
Mental Health & Addiction Services Division
Multnomah County Health Department