



March 12, 2017

Re: Save Mental Health/Support SB 860

Dear Oregon State Legislators,

I have been a private practice clinical psychologist in Tigard since 2000 when I returned to my native Oregon to raise my children after training and working out of state for 10 years. Providing services the mental health field has always been challenging, but has been my life passion. I specialize in working with developmentally disabled children, adults and their families. When I started working in Oregon we did not have enough mental health insurance benefits to provide enough services to really be very effective. Our state legislature worked hard to increase benefits so that we eventually received parity with medical services in an effort to protect the vulnerable people in our communities and reduce the number of mentally ill people in hospitals and prisons. We still have work to do.

Despite the fact that mental health services represent a small percentage of the total medical dollars paid insurance companies have continued to reduce fees and over manage our services. I am currently paid 40% less these days that I was 10 years ago. As a result I have to see more clients per day in an effort to maintain some of the income my family is used to. My expenses over the years, however, have increased because I feel ethically obligated to pay my office staff a living wage with benefits. The cost of office space and other expenses has also increased substantially in the last decade as well. The clients we see in mental health are emotionally challenging, sometimes dangerous, and require skill to keep stable and safe in the community. Providing mental health services is stressful work. Without adequate compensation and the stress of insurance company's irregular payments and requests for refunds a year or more after services are provided make me feel helpless to control my income, support my family reliably and reduces my personal quality of life substantially. Despite being a very skilled clinician I am considering alternative types of employment to reduce stress and stabilize my income. I question whether the satisfaction of doing this difficult work is worth the cost and frustration any more.

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Mental health services pay for themselves. I know that clients who are under my care use the emergency room less, come to the attention of police less often, are more likely to be employed, and are better family members than they would be without mental health support. Mental health clinicians are making our communities safer, families healthier, reducing abuse and neglect of vulnerable people and saving tax payer dollars. Please help us continue to provide the high quality services we that are so important. Please support SB 860 to help continue to improve mental health accessibility.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dr. Leslie Carter". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Leslie Carter, Ph.D.

Psychologist

OR #1386

Leslie Carter, PhD; Psychologist (OR#1386) www.DrLeslieCarter.com

9600 SW Oak St, Suite 325, Tigard, Oregon 97223 Phone: 503.206-5578, Fax: 503.935.5884

E-Mail: DrLeslie.Carter@Frontier.com