Re: Support for HB 4004, relating to grants to behavioral health treatment providers for staff compensation and workforce retention and recruitment.

Dear Chair Nosse and Representative Sanchez,

On behalf of OCHIN, I appreciate the opportunity to offer support for HB 4004, which supports health care workforce by providing special compensation for retention and recruitment of staff. Oregon is facing workforce shortages in community health centers, public health departments, and critical access hospitals. OCHIN applauds efforts to alleviate this growing crisis that impacts health care access.

OCHIN is an Oregon based national health research network and continuous learning health system locally-controlled provider collaborative that offers technology solutions, informatics, evidence-based research, and policy insights. OCHIN network members in Oregon provide care to more than 580,000 patients and had more than 2.3 million visits in 2021. For over two decades, OCHIN has advanced equitable health care solutions by leveraging the strength of our network’s unique data set and the practical experience of our members to drive technology innovation at scale for patients and providers in underserved communities.

The impact of COVID-19, including the current Omicron surge, has devastated the workforce among health centers that face unprecedented rates of turnover and burnout. Community clinics are struggling to maintain capacity and cannot scale to meet growing demand - an alarming trend, since health centers play a critical role in reducing burden on local emergency departments, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Community clinics are hardest hit by vacancies among support and operational staff who shoulder clinics’ administrative duties (including front desk, credentialling, and billing) so providers can focus on delivering patient care. The need for technically trained support and operational staff will only grow with the adoption and implementation of modernized health information technology, which is urgently needed to transform clinical care delivery and improve public health capabilities at scale.

Incentivizing health care workers to remain in the field and building pipelines of skilled new workers is crucial for the sustainability of the health care sector in the face of COVID-19 and equitable access. Please contact me at stollj@ochin.org to discuss how we can help to develop the health care workforce Oregon urgently needs.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Stoll
Executive Vice President
External Affairs