



February 9, 2021

Representative Anna Williams, Chair
House Committee on Human Services
Oregon State Capitol
Via remote testimony submission

RE: HB 2394

Chair Williams and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share the support of O4AD, the Oregon Association of Area Agencies on Aging & Disabilities, for HB 2394. Social isolation has been a significant ancillary crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Older adults and people with disabilities have followed medical advice to socially distance and quarantine. This could be in their home, in a community based care setting or a nursing facility. While this would, in most cases, help to protect them from COVID, the strain of this isolation has taken its toll.

Case Managers within the Area Agencies who work with those receiving Medicaid services have reported serious depression and anxiety from their consumers who are isolated. Case Managers and Adult Protective Services staff have not been able to meet with their consumers regularly to check in or provide that point of human contact. Consumers frequently have reported increasing depression and stress from their isolation. Normal activities that can help an individual remain engaged and active such as exercise classes, visiting a meal site, and interaction with friends and family have all led to poorer health, increased sedentary days, lack of access to healthcare services and for some, an increase in suicidal thoughts and abuse of substances including prescription medications.

As a state, we are all working to meet the challenges of COVID. As we do this, we cannot leave our vulnerable populations behind. HB 2394 is a first step to help those within facility based care to have access to some support to overcome social isolation. We support this work and the intention of the sponsors. But we implore the committee to not forget those who are a part of Oregon's in-home system of long term services and supports. While our focus on home and community based care is often celebrated for older adults and people with physical disabilities, there is a necessity to find the services and resources to meet the unique challenges of social isolation now and in the future. The long term impacts of social isolation threaten the goals of Oregon to preserve the independence, dignity, choice and safety of older adults and people with disabilities.

We look forward to this continued conversation.

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