

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and members of the committee,

My name is Tajwar Taher and I am part of the Scholars for a Healthy Oregon Initiative (SHOI). SHOI is an OHSU program that offers full tuition and fees to a select number of students in exchange for at least five years of medical service in a rural or underserved part of Oregon.

I grew up in Pendleton, Oregon watching my dad provide healthcare to the community as a doctor. I was struck by the intimate, cross-generational relationships he had with his patients. Being invited to patient's farms, participating in the Rodeo, and feeling like we were an integral part of the community was not the case when we moved to Portland. Seeing how much more satisfaction my dad got working in Pendleton compared to the big city convinced me that I wanted to go back to a small town to serve as a doctor, someplace I felt was home.

These feelings were deepened when I returned to Eastern Oregon to complete a 3-month Family Medicine rotation in Baker City. I saw firsthand the sort of disparities and challenges rural patients face compared to their urban counterparts with regards to access to care and what we in the city consider basic necessities for living (good grocery stores, internet). It was all the more heart-wrenching that people who had so little could be so loving and welcoming. Despite the fact that I'm unlike most people in Eastern Oregon (I'm Bangladeshi and a Muslim) I've always felt genuinely valued in rural Oregon. I wanted to return some of the good faith and love I was shown as a kid and as a medical student. I want to serve the people in Oregon I believe need the most help. Thanks to the SHOI program, I applied to and will start a Family Medicine residency with the full confidence that I can balance my financial obligations to my family with my determination to serve rural Oregon as I've been relieved of massive medical school debt.

My story is not unique. Without the SHOI program, it would be nearly impossible for underpopulated and underserved areas to attract talented doctors. Coupled with the cost of medical school and the sometimes lower pay in these areas, taking jobs in rural or underserved areas without financial assistance would result in significant debt for providers.

There are hundreds of qualified Oregonians who are willing to serve in rural and underserved Oregon, but if the funding for SHOI is cut, then we know that these areas of our state will feel the effects. As we begin our road to recovery from the pandemic, we cannot afford to leave underserved populations behind. We urge you to fully fund the Scholars for a Healthy Oregon Initiative so we can continue to serve some of the communities that need it the most.

Sincerely,

Tajwar Taher  
MD Candidate, Class of 2021