

May 12, 2021

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the Joint Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of OHSU's policy option package request that proposes a new Wy'east Nursing Baccalaureate and Post-baccalaureate Pathway to recruit, train and retain American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) into baccalaureate and higher degree nursing career paths, modeled after the OHSU School of Medicine Wy'east Post-Baccalaureate Pathway.

Wy'east is an innovative 10-month post-baccalaureate pathway designed specifically for AI/AN individuals who were not accepted to medical school or who do not possess a qualifying MCAT score for medical school, and aims to prepare them to excel as medical students and physicians. The program includes a mix of science and public health coursework, MCAT preparation, research, study and self-care skills, and community health service with Oregon tribes. When students have successfully completed all aspects of the pathway, they are offered acceptance to the OHSU School of Medicine. The results of OHSU Wy'east are truly outstanding and without precedent – with 100% of participants meeting the metrics for conditional acceptance (13/13) and 87% choosing to matriculate into an MD-granting medical school (11/13) in the first two cohorts. What is more impressive – nearly 10% of all AI/AN-alone matriculants into US MD-granting medical schools *nationally* in the past two years are OHSU Wy'east Scholars. The Wy'east model represents a new dawn to train the AI/AN health leaders of tomorrow.

As the current director of the Wy'east School of Medicine Pathway, I've seen the tremendous impact that supportive pathway programs have on the lives of AI/AN students – providing the opportunity to actualize a future where they are both Native and a physician. Your support of a Wy'east Nursing Pathway program would mean that more AI/AN students could have that transformational experience.

In addition to my work with Wy'east, I am an Academic Pediatrician at OHSU, a citizen of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (one of the nine federally-recognized tribes in Oregon) and serve in my own tribal community clinic one day per week. I have seen first-hand the health disparities that exist for AI/AN's. American Indians/Alaska Natives have some of the worst health outcomes when compared to the general population. The broader vision of Wy'east is to decrease health disparities by providing a practical pathway for AI/AN people into health professions. Expanding Wy'east into the nursing field will help move us closer to that vision.

Serving as the director of Wy'east is one of the greatest joys of my work. It is extremely fulfilling to mentor AI/AN students, who are on the cusp of getting into medical school, and help them cultivate their Native identity within an academic setting and pursue their dreams. Please support OHSU's proposal for a Wy'east Nursing Baccalaureate and Post-baccalaureate Pathway so that more Native students with the talent and drive to care for their communities can achieve their goals within the health care field. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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