

Senate Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Patterson and Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on the proposed bill SB 469 Establishing an Indian Health Scholarship Program.

As a Coquille Tribal Council Representative, I'm writing to express our support for this bill. We, the Coquille Tribe, have a relatively new medical clinic on our reservation in Coos Bay and a small clinic in Eugene. We experience various challenges due to the rural location of our reservation, and staffing is always one of them. While we offer competitive salaries, benefits packages, and are one of the largest employers in Coos County, our location is prohibitive to many medical practitioners seeking a different type of lifestyle.

Often times when we do attract practitioners to our clinics, there is a major adjustment period for everyone, with the community who visits our clinic and the practitioner working in our community. If we make it through that period, as employers, we do everything we can to keep that practitioner at our clinic which is not always the healthiest situation for our bottom line.

Conversely, when we're able to employ medical practitioners who are Tribal Citizens, such as our Dental Health Aide Therapist (DHAT), there is excitement to live and work in the community where the practitioner is family. They know what to expect and are grateful to be able to work in the community. In the DHAT situation, community members are also more eager to get the care they need knowing their appointment is with someone they know and feel understood and respected by.

When discussing grant opportunities with students in my former role as Higher Education Coordinator for my Tribe, one barrier was always cost. There were no grants that covered the total amount of school and training required for a medical degree, and the time investment was prohibitive. In our population, the #1 reason our students do not graduate from college is the need to go to work. Another barrier is location. As our population is also mostly first-generation students, moving away for college and residencies was one thing, but then facing the possibility of having to then work somewhere outside of a familiar area right after graduation was another obstacle many students were not ready to face.

This bill would make it much easier for our students to come back home and work in one of our own clinics, providing better quality of life for everyone involved. In addition, our children growing up in the community will have more role models to look up to and learn from, which will mean a higher rate of future college graduates as well. Every boost we can give to our college students seeking higher level degrees has a ripple effect throughout our communities and the State.

Thank you for your time, and to Senator Hansell for sponsoring this bill.

Sincerely,

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