

Submitter: Victor Chang
On Behalf Of: SOU
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

April 21, 2023

Chair Steiner, Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee-

My name is Victor Chang and I am an Associate Professor at Southern Oregon University in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program. I am testifying today in support of \$1.05 billion appropriation for higher education in Oregon, and importantly the \$15 million dollar support fund for Oregon's Regional Universities and requested in the Governor's Budget. I am also providing additional testimony in support of HB3274 which seeks to increase the behavioral health workforce in Southern Oregon.

SOU provides life changing education opportunities to our region and our rural communities. In particular, we graduate approximately 20 clinical mental health counseling students who are 100% employed in the region and throughout the state. Our stakeholders (and the staff and leadership of all our community partners) are clamoring for more of our counseling students. They desperately need our well-trained students to fully staff their agencies in order to meet the behavioral health needs of our region.

Right now, Oregon's Regional Universities are suffering from catastrophic funding shortfalls, leading to further deep cuts to faculty and staff positions. These cuts threaten program offerings, cannibalize our institutions, and make our efforts to revitalize impossible. Students can't succeed when administrators cut faculty and staff positions and fail to invest in programs and services.

Although the CMHC program was not directly cut in the SOU plan being proposed to SOU's Board of Trustees this week, we have been impacted by existing staff and faculty vacancies already. Our admissions processes, program assessment, financial aid/business services, grant & IRB support and overall graduate school support have all been negatively affected by existing vacancies and I anticipate even more impact from the impending cuts.

With additional funding, we can secure faculty and frontline service jobs at our institutions, increase service levels that promote student success, and promote sustainable growth for our institutions. Our students' success depends on strong funding right now, not on a rainy day fund.

Faculty at my institution, alongside fellow regional universities (EOU/OIT/SOU/WOU) are united in our commitment to Oregon's future. I urgently ask that Oregon commit \$15 million dollars to supporting our Regional Universities. Furthermore, I ask for the additional \$2.5 million that HB3274 is calling for to help Southern Oregon better address its myriad and complex behavioral health needs.

Thank you for your service during this intense legislative session.

Best regards,

Victor Chang, PhD LPC
Associate Professor of Clinical Mental Health Counseling
Southern Oregon University