



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT



DR. ROBERTO GUTIERREZ

April 26, 2023

Testimony for SB 523

Chair Lively, Vice Chair McIntire, Vice Chair Ruiz, and members of the Oregon House Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Dr. Roberto Gutierrez, I am the president of Klamath Community College, and I am submitting written testimony in support of SB 523, which would authorize community colleges to award Bachelor of Science: Nursing (BSN) degrees.

Oregon's community colleges can help provide solutions for the bottleneck in the nursing education pathway, which has been instrumental in creating a statewide shortage of both BSN certified nurses and nurse educators. According to a March report from the Oregon Longitudinal Data Collaborative, "Oregon ranks last in nursing graduates per capita from public postsecondary institutions in the United States," and these programs need to double in size in order to meet demand.

Through providing BSN degree programs, community colleges can bolster the state's highly skilled nursing workforce, provide opportunities for education and career advancement, and increase the number of nurse educators.

Nurses who complete an RN to BSN program provide a higher level of care through increased knowledge and skills. They can be more competitive in the job market, particularly in rural areas, with more opportunities for promotion and higher pay, as the BSN is recognized and valued by the healthcare industry and nursing boards.

After completing their BSN degree, these health care professionals are eligible through the Oregon State Board of Nursing to become nurse educator-associates, increasing nurse faculty numbers at colleges and further allowing for expansion of statewide nursing programs to meet the current nurse shortage.

Community colleges offer education opportunities that serve the needs of their communities. They provide education and skills training for a diverse range of students, offer the opportunity for more equitable outcomes for our underserved and marginalized community members, provide accessible and cost-effective education programs which help reduce student debt, and strengthen our communities with a highly skilled workforce.



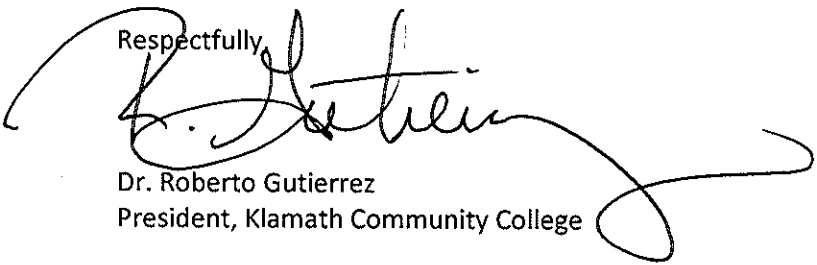
Oregon's rural health care systems rely heavily on community colleges to help supply a significant portion of their nursing and health care worker staff, and local graduates frequently stay in their communities long-term. Regional health care providers recognize that it is critical to provide opportunities for growth, both professionally and personally, in order to retain staff.

More community-based opportunities are needed for nurses with an Associate Degree in Nursing to advance their skills and further their professions. Students achieving an RN in many of the state's remote counties cannot leave their families or communities, and they face overwhelming challenges in entering highly competitive BSN programs at other state institutions. As an example, since 2015, only 16.5% of former KCC RN ADN graduates have gone on to achieve their BSN. Of those who did, all except one went to out-of-state institutions. These students want to continue on to the next steps in their careers – in Oregon. They have so much untapped potential. Our current cohort of RN students have already set high professional goals. They stated in earlier testimony to the Senate on aspirations to achieve the BSN, and master's degrees, to become nurse practitioners, and nurse educator associates.

Approval of SB 523 is the right thing to do for our students, and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony in support of SB 523, authorizing community colleges to award Bachelor of Science, Nursing degrees.

Respectfully,


Dr. Roberto Gutierrez
President, Klamath Community College

