

SB 1592 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Education

Action Date: 02/15/24

Action: Do pass with amendments. Refer to Ways and Means by prior reference. (Printed A-Eng).

Vote: 5-0-0-0

Yeas: 5 - Anderson, Dembrow, Frederick, Gelser Blouin, Weber

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

Prepared By: Lisa Gezelter, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 2/6, 2/13, 2/15

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure appropriates \$6 million to expand Oregon’s behavioral health workforce.

Detailed Summary

Appropriates \$6 million to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Requires the funding to be divided among the following institutions:

- \$1 million to Eastern Oregon University;
- \$1 million to the Oregon Institute of Technology;
- \$2 million to Portland State University; and
- \$1 million to Western Oregon University.

Requires receiving institutions to use the funding to expand the behavioral health workforce. Establishes allowable uses for the funds. Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Oregon's behavioral health workforce needs
- Lack of training opportunities
- Provisions of amendment

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

The amendment adds an option for joining with labor-management partnerships to allowable uses for the funds.

BACKGROUND:

In February 2022, the Oregon Health Authority issued a [report on the behavioral health workforce in Oregon](#). The report found that the state’s behavioral health workforce was in a state of crisis, that Oregon has the fourth highest rate of unmet need for mental health treatment in the country, and that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for behavioral health services. The lack of available providers means that Oregonians needing behavioral health treatment find it difficult to access care. According to the report, providers expressed frustration with low wages, educational barriers, and work environment stress.

Previous legislative efforts to improve conditions for Oregon’s behavioral health workforce include:

- [House Bill 2086 \(2021\)](#), which required a study with recommendations for how to increase wages for behavioral health providers.
- [House Bill 2949 \(2021\)](#), which allocated \$80 million to recruit and retain providers from specific communities.
- [House Bill 4071 \(2022\)](#), which expanded the number of behavioral health providers who would be eligible for financial incentives from OHA.

The Oregon Health Authority created the [Behavioral Health Workforce Initiative](#) to distribute the funds allocated by House Bill 2949 (2021), which included \$60 million to develop a diverse workforce and \$20 million for clinical

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supervision grants. Under this program, OHA has awarded eight grants to provide tuition assistance and stipends.