



EASTERN OREGON  
UNIVERSITY

Good morning, Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair Fragala and Harbick, and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Dr. Hope Schuermann, I am currently serving as the Director of the Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Eastern Oregon University. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today in support of HB 3129.

The Clinical Mental Health Counseling program was planned and launched in consultation with Oregon Health Authority and providers in eastern Oregon beginning in 2021 and welcomed students in 2023. We now have over 130 students, with our first cohort currently in clinical coursework and serving the community. Eighty-three of our current students have received funding through previous legislative initiatives. Our program seeks to increase the behavioral health workforce in rural areas, some of the most underserved and high need areas in the state. We focus on recruitment from these areas and encourage people who live in these areas to apply, through a grow your own model. This is a more feasible model to fill these areas of need than recruitment to bring in professionals from outside areas for multiple reasons cited in the research literature, including lack of housing and greater community trust of locals. The CMHC program at EOU caters to students who live in rural areas, are changing professions, taking care of families, and/or working full time as we are fully online through synchronous and asynchronous work and offering full and part time options. As EOU continues to work to fill the gap in care, we are also launching a fully online Master of Social Work in Fall 2025. Bills such as the one we are discussing today create accessibility for students across OR regardless of socioeconomic status can attain a master's degree and contribute to workforce. Many of the students who have received funding thus far often share that they would not be able to return to school without financial support.

Thank you,  
Hope

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