

February 25, 2025

RE: HB 3129

Dear Chair Hudson and Members of the House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development;

I was scheduled to testify at the hearing on this bill earlier today, but had multiple technical difficulties that kept me from doing so.

While listening to other testimony, I heard many of my colleagues share some of my same concerns about the state of the behavioral healthcare workforce in Oregon. I also heard them talk about some of the same goals I hope for as we attempt to address the crisis created by the lack of workers in this critical area. Therefore, I will focus on just a few of my main points:

1. As shown in the “[State of Mental Health in America 2023](#)” report from Mental Health America, Oregon ranks either last or near last in multiple categories. Our overall ranking is 50<sup>th</sup> out of 51 (including US States and the District of Columbia). The need for a skilled workforce is a problem nationwide, and already at crisis proportions in Oregon.
2. We know that this dearth of trained workers is especially apparent in rural and frontier communities. We need to expand options to train and educate *workers who already reside in these areas* to provide services to their own communities.
3. We **MUST** create career pathways for behavioral healthcare workers that help them visualize a career ladder. Without an educational background, workers can get stuck in entry-level positions which result in them leaving the field altogether. By beginning at the community college level, with programs such as the Certified Alcohol and Drug Certification and the Qualified Mental Health Associate, we can help future workers see that they can have a long and vibrant career within the behavioral healthcare field.
4. Community colleges already work with diverse students who represent underserved communities. Our students represent first generation college attenders, different ethnic and cultural identities, and students with a wealth of lived experience. If we truly want the workforce to reflect the communities we serve, we must attract and keep these future workers in the field.

I appreciate your time and attention to this matter, and ask you to support HB 3129.

Sincerely,  
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