

Chair Reardon, Vice Chairs Alonso Leon and Whisnant, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paxton Rothwell, and I am writing today to strongly support HB 3129, which invests in Oregon's behavioral health workforce. As a student in a Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Oregon State University – Cascades, I am directly impacted by the policies and funding that support mental health education and workforce development.

Oregon is facing a **severe shortage of behavioral health professionals**, leaving many communities without access to critical mental health services. HB 3129 provides **targeted funding** to support education, training, and workforce expansion, ensuring that more professionals—including students like me—can enter and **remain** in the field.

Why HB 3129 Matters

- **Workforce Shortages Must Be Addressed**
Oregon's demand for mental health services is growing, yet access remains limited due to workforce shortages. This bill will help build a stronger pipeline of qualified professionals.
- **Reducing Barriers for Students and Future Providers**
Financial burdens, lack of internship opportunities, and unclear career pathways often discourage students from entering or staying in behavioral health fields. HB 3129 provides funding for education, training, and supervision, making it more feasible for students to complete their training and enter the workforce.
- **Improving Diversity and Expanding Access to Underserved Communities**
Investing in education and workforce expansion has a proven impact on diversifying the mental health field, which in turn improves service accessibility for historically underserved communities.

In my experience as a current counseling student, there are few if any paid internship opportunities. During the last year of my Masters in Counseling program I will be required to work a 20+ hour per week internship plus attend classes. Because the internships are often unpaid, students like myself are left with very few employment options that can work within the balance of school and the internship. This puts another financial burden on students who are working toward a career in counseling. If the State were to put more funding toward mental health care, including internships, I am certain that more people would be drawn to working in this field, helping to decrease the severe workforce shortages Oregon is experiencing.

The mental health field is full of people who are committed to helping people and they need support. Mental healthcare is critical to helping Oregonians be the best they can be. It is critical to help decrease addiction-related issues, dangerous driving habits, and many other issues that are hurting all Oregonians. Mental healthcare workers need to be supported by the State in order to keep helping Oregonians from all walks of life lead healthy lives.

I am committed to becoming a counselor, and I urge this committee to invest in the future of mental health in Oregon by passing HB 3129. This bill will make a tangible difference in expanding access to mental health services across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Paxton Rothwell