

TO: Senate Committee on Early Childhood & Behavioral Health
FROM: Brent Wilder, President
Oregon Alliance for Independent Colleges and Universities
DATE: March 18, 2025
RE: Support of SB 142

The Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities (The Alliance) is the voice of Oregon's independent, nonprofit higher education sector, actively supporting the success of our member colleges and universities, their students, and alumni.

I am writing to offer our strong support for SB 142 and the proposed amendments, and to express my appreciation to the crafters from the Governor's office as well as my colleagues in higher education institutions.

SB 142, with its amendments, will encourage collaboration between OHA and HECC to find ways to support the behavioral health workforce—a much-needed initiative. The Alliance and our member colleges and universities, deeply invested in the future of Oregon's mental and behavioral health system, believe this bill is a crucial step toward ensuring our state can meet the growing demand for qualified behavioral health professionals.

Oregon's independent, nonprofit institutions, in partnership with public institutions, provide a solid foundation for training the next generation of behavioral health professionals. Six of our member institutions—Bushnell University, Corban University, George Fox University, Lewis & Clark College, Pacific University, and Western Seminary—offer graduate programs specifically designed to meet the growing need for qualified professionals in the state.

The Alliance represents 79% of the state's master's degrees and 90% of professional practice doctoral degrees in behavioral health. In the 2022-23 academic year alone, these colleges and universities awarded 758 master's degrees and 176 doctoral degrees in fields such as psychology, mental and social health services, marriage and family therapy, mental health counseling, and more.

While these efforts are significant, much more needs to be done to meet the growing demand for services across the state. SB 142 will expand and strengthen these programs by providing education cost support grants, loan forgiveness, workforce training, and recruitment/retention initiatives. All of these measures will lead to more professionals being trained and retained in the behavioral health field.

I strongly urge you to support SB 142, as it is a critical step in strengthening Oregon's mental and behavioral health system. By investing in the education and training of future behavioral health professionals, we are ensuring that our state will be prepared to address the growing mental health crisis.