

School of Social Work

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March 18, 2025

Senator Lew Frederick, Chair
Senate Education Committee
900 Court Street NE, HR B
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Frederick and Members of the Committee,

Portland State University supports SB 142 with the -1 amendment. This bill is a key component in a multi-pronged approach to support behavioral health services and grow Oregon's behavioral health workforce. There is a clear and urgent need for additional behavioral health providers with advanced training and diverse backgrounds to provide behavioral health care and coordination in Oregon.

Portland State's School of Social Work (SSW) has existed since 1961 as a call from the Oregon Legislature to serve the state's social work educational needs. PSU is the only public institution serving the entire state that offers a comprehensive in-person and remote offerings of our undergraduate and graduate degrees. In the last year, PSU's SSW grew by launching our newly online, undergraduate Human Service degree program, expanding our online BSW and MSW Programs.

Every year, the School of Social Work prepares over 1,000 students to meet the state's workforce needs in behavioral health. PSU is committed to providing high quality and accessible education to our students, who have mostly been people who reside in our state. The majority of graduates also remain in the state, including our rural communities, to work after graduation.

PSU has articulation agreements from various community colleges to our undergraduate Family Studies and Human Services Program, where they can seamlessly transfer to their academic credits. Those that also graduate from community colleges with their associate degrees in related fields can easily apply to the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program. Most importantly, PSU's SSW offers an accelerated program to the Masters of Social Work (MSW) Program called the Advanced Standing Program. It is for those who graduate with their BSW degrees from an accredited School of Social Work. Students may obtain their MSW degree within a year.

PSU's SSW also maintains strong partnerships with community organizations, behavioral health providers, and state agencies, which are essential in training and sustaining the behavioral health

workforce. We work closely with mental health agencies, community-based providers, hospitals, and government agencies to provide field placements and practical training for students pursuing careers as QMHAs, QMHPs, Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors, and other essential behavioral health roles. These partnerships ensure that students gain practical experience and are well-prepared to serve Oregonians upon graduation.

The additional opportunity for upfront investments through SB 142 will help PSU sustain, strengthen, and expand capacity to admit, successfully retain and graduate more students in behavioral health-related fields, including support for student scholarships and funded placements. Such investment will continue to support strong pathways to the helping professions, from undergraduate to graduate degrees.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge your support of SB 142 with the -1 amendment to invest in what is already working in successfully preparing students to enter Oregon's behavioral health workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Wong', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Evaon Wong
Dean and Professor, School of Social Work
Portland State University