



TINA KOTEK
GOVERNOR

March 18, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Reynolds
The Honorable Dick Anderson
Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
900 Court St NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Reynolds and Vice-Chair Anderson,

Senate Bill 142 with the -1 amendment is a necessary next step for Oregon to make progress on recruiting and retaining the mental health and addiction care professionals we need across the state.

My recommended budget for the next two years maintains a dual strategy of (1) increasing treatment capacity by providing more spaces and places for people to heal and (2) strengthening the availability of the trained health care workforce we need. Ways & Means will consider the \$90 million I've recommended to create another 363 treatment beds. SB 142 is specifically about bolstering the provider pipeline and stabilizing worker retention.

Right now, depending on where you live or what help you need to address a mental health or addiction challenge, there are probably not enough people available to help you. Not enough licensed counselors or Qualified Mental Health Professionals, or Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors, or Psychiatrists or Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners or Peer Counselors or other behavioral health care professionals. At the same time, people considering a career in mental health and addiction treatment struggle to enter and stay in the field. We need to keep working to fix both of these problems.

SB 142 seeks to bring more people into the mental health and addiction care professions and retain the workers already serving in community settings. It does so with four specific investments:

First, the bill invests \$20 million for workforce development through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, which is the state's education and workforce agency. This funding would support expanding education and training opportunities by increasing instructor capacity and supporting clinical placement capacity to increase degrees and certificates in critical workforce shortage occupations for community mental health settings. The investment is projected to result in 4,000 students ready to enter the workforce to help people.

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Second, the bill invests \$5 million at the HECC for student scholarships. This scholarship investment means more new students could afford to pursue behavioral health careers. The investment is anticipated to fund scholarships for 200 students - which means more people would be available to help Oregonians having mental health or addiction needs.

Third, the bill invests \$8 million for loan repayment and loan forgiveness programs. This program would open the door for approximately 147 Master-level clinicians with student debt who commit to working in the publicly funded behavioral health system for up to two years. Professionals who train in Oregon should stay in Oregon, and this incentivizes them to do so.

And fourth, the bill invests \$13.8 million for grants to community mental health employer-providers to retain their direct care staff. This is crucial funding to support community-based providers and Tribes to deploy a myriad of retention strategies including housing stipends, loan repayment, and other wraparound supports. This assistance is tied to ongoing service in the publicly funded behavioral health system and will serve at least 1,000 employees. The community mental health provider workforce meets people where they are – so this means Oregonians would get their acute needs met because more providers are available to treat them.

The investments in this bill will support things that are working. This bill and my recommended budget build on progress to date by setting clear and achievable outcomes. Strategically invested resources will get us where we need to go.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tina Kotek", with a stylized, cursive script.

Governor Tina Kotek