

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Marc Overbeck and I'm Director of Governor of Government Relations for Southern Oregon University.

On behalf of Oregon's seven public universities, we offer our support of and appreciation for the commitment expressed by Governor Kotek through the -1 amendment to SB 142 to expand Oregon's behavioral health provider workforce.

This bill will be an important step toward expanding Oregon's behavioral health workforce, which is critically needed across our state, particularly in crisis services for our most vulnerable populations. We are grateful to Governor Kotek for prioritizing investments in behavioral health workforce expansion and working with public universities to that end..

Oregon faces a dire shortage of licensed behavioral health workers. As you know, these professionals are essential in meeting the growing demand for mental health and addiction services—especially when it comes to delivering crisis care for individuals facing life-threatening situations or severe emotional distress. Too often, individuals in crisis are left without timely intervention, leading to worsened outcomes. The need for behavioral health professionals across the state is urgent, and action must be taken now to build the workforce that is essential for Oregon's future.

Oregon's public universities play a crucial role in preparing the next generation of behavioral health professionals. Our institutions have educated thousands of students who have gone on to serve in Oregon's behavioral health workforce, and in particular the public behavioral health system.

SB 142 is a critical investment in Oregon's future, and the public universities urge the committee to approve the -1 amendments. This bill can enable public universities and partner organizations to further expand behavioral health degree programs and provide additional resources for students to complete their training. These programs are crucial for ensuring that Oregon has enough licensed providers to close the gap between need and available services.

SB 142 is a key step to addressing the systemic challenges in Oregon's behavioral health system. Oregon's public universities are eager to work alongside the state, local communities, and other partners to address the behavioral health crisis. Many institutions are already engaging in this way, and these investments can help deepen those relationships.

Thank you, Chair Reynolds and committee members, for considering this vital bill, particularly in a time of budget uncertainties. We urge you to approve SB 142 with the -1 amendments and the positive impact it will have on our state's behavioral health workforce and the well-being of all Oregonians.