



Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
RE: Support for Senate Bill 142 -1

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health,

Located in Portland, Oregon, Central City Concern (CCC) provides a comprehensive continuum of affordable housing options integrated with direct social services, including health care, recovery, and employment. In 2024, CCC served 15,991 people experiencing or at risk of homelessness by providing affordable and supportive housing, integrated health services, addiction recovery, and employment assistance. CCC strongly supports Senate Bill 142 and the –1 amendment, which directs the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to administer grant programs to strengthen our behavioral health workforce.

Oregon’s behavioral health workforce is in crisis. Chronic underfunding and workforce shortages—estimated at 35,000 professionals statewide—are exacerbated by instability, a lack of diversity among care providers, and an overwhelming demand for services as mental health and substance use needs continue to rise. The ongoing uncertainty surrounding federal public student loan forgiveness programs makes a state intervention in loan repayment all the more impactful. Without bold, strategic investment, we risk deepening this crisis and leaving thousands without the care they urgently need.

In 2024, CCC launched the Behavioral Health Talent Academy (BHTA) to directly address this shortage by providing employees with career advancement pathways and access to vital certifications, including Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CADC 1), Qualified Mental Health Associate (QMHA 1), and Peer Support Specialist (CRM & PWS). The BHTA provides financial assistance, mentorship, and wraparound career development resources to ensure participants can successfully navigate their education while balancing work and life responsibilities.

However, CCC struggles to secure sustainable funding for supervision costs and stipends for trainees, which puts this programming at risk. SB 142-1 represents an essential opportunity to invest in programs like CCC’s BHTA, directly channeling training resources to community-based organizations engaged in frontline workforce development.

Yet training alone will not solve the workforce crisis. Recruitment and retention remain significant hurdles due to high burnout rates driven by overwhelming caseloads, secondary trauma, and historically inadequate wages. Too often, talented professionals leave the field within a few years, erasing gains made through workforce development initiatives.

That is why SB 142-1 is so critical—it does not just fund training but also invests in sustainable workforce recruitment and retention through wage increases, housing assistance, professional development, stipends, and supervision. Without these key supports, we risk losing the very workforce we are working so hard to build.



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Furthermore, this bill ensures that funding reaches community-based organizations—the frontline providers who train, support, and employ behavioral health professionals. We cannot rely solely on higher education institutions to address this crisis; training and support must be embedded in real-world service settings where workers are most needed. By providing funding to both students and the organizations facilitating their training and support, SB 142-1 creates a comprehensive workforce strategy that both grows and sustains the field.

We encourage working with the Governor's office to ensure these supports are available to the workers who need them most: those who've dedicated their lives to serving individuals on Medicaid and those serving individuals with the most acute behavioral health needs. Additionally we are sharing ideas for how to ensure ongoing support for the workforce through an incentive payment that will allow providers to maintain any investments made in the workforce.

We urge the Committee to pass SB 142 and the –1 amendment and make this crucial investment in Oregon's future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Andrew Mendenhall, MD, DABFM, DABPM, FASAM
President and CEO, Central City Concern