

TO: Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber and Members of the Committee
FROM: Brent Wilder, President
Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities
DATE: April 7, 2025
RE: Testimony in Support of SB 581

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 in support of SB 581, which proposes the creation of a crucial Psychology Provider Incentive Program within the Oregon Health Authority. This bill seeks to address the growing shortage of mental health professionals in our state by providing housing stipends and loan repayment subsidies to students pursuing doctoral programs in psychology, as well as licensed psychologists who have received cultural competency training. These incentives are necessary to ensure that Oregon's diverse communities have access to high-quality, culturally competent psychological care, especially in underserved and rural areas.

Mental health needs across Oregon are substantial, and too many individuals, particularly in underserved and rural areas, lack access to adequate psychological services. A key part of addressing this crisis is ensuring we have a sufficient number of licensed psychologists equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to serve Oregon's diverse population. SB 581 addresses this need directly by incentivizing students to complete culturally competent training in their doctoral programs and then work in Oregon.

The bill includes two important provisions:

- **Housing Stipends for Students in Approved Doctoral Programs:** This provision provides housing stipends to students who complete courses offering cultural competency training. These stipends encourage students to gain the specialized knowledge necessary to work with Oregon's diverse communities, including those from historically marginalized groups.
- **Loan Repayment Subsidies for Licensed Psychologists:** This provision offers loan repayment subsidies to licensed psychologists who have completed the cultural competency courses during their doctoral training. These financial incentives will help alleviate the significant burden of student loan debt, which often prevents newly licensed psychologists from entering or remaining in the field. Furthermore, individuals who have received housing stipends during their doctoral training are eligible for loan repayment subsidies once licensed.

By incentivizing students to pursue culturally competent training and providing financial support for licensed psychologists, this bill will have a lasting positive impact on the mental health workforce in Oregon.

I urge you to support SB 581, as it provides a vital solution to the shortage of psychologists in Oregon while enhancing the quality of mental health care available to Oregonians.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.