

From: Erin Johnson, MSW, Associate Dean, Behavioral Health Sciences, George Fox University

Re: Testimony for SB 581

Date: April 4, 2025

As an educator and leader of the academic behavioral health programs at George Fox University, including the Doctor of Clinical Psychology (PsyD) program, I am writing to give testimony for the important elements of SB 581 which creates pathways to provide education that are sustainable for students preparing for critical work in the behavioral and mental health professions. The PsyD program at George Fox University has a rich and extensive history in developing and graduating doctoral students for work with individuals with mental health needs.

The rise in mental health needs in Oregon must be matched by available professionals providing services to our residents. This bill creates a pathway forward to support students and licensed psychologists who have received cultural competency training while they live and work in the state of Oregon. The incentives the bill provides, housing stipends (for students in approved doctoral programs) and loan repayment subsidies (for licensed psychologists) ensure the well-trained psychologists graduating from our Oregon schools stay in Oregon and work in our communities.

Furthermore, this bill supports the education of psychologists to be grounded in cultural competency with a strong understanding of the diverse needs that present themselves in our urban, suburban, and rural communities. Required courses focused on diversity and cultural competence embedded in the doctoral clinical psychology programs create a strong foundation of cultural competency for all clinical psychologists. Furthermore, other required courses and elective courses within the curriculum incorporate elements of cultural competency specific to the content within the courses. Utilizing the content of the required and elective courses that exist in the programs accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA) will create accessible pathways for students to apply for and receive housing stipends to support their basic needs while enrolled in the doctoral program.

Meeting the needs of those who are vulnerable and marginalized in our communities throughout Oregon is a top priority for behavioral health providers. Incentivising education that prepares doctoral students with the necessary cultural competency to serve those in our community experiencing mental health needs will create a better pathway for all of Oregon. Providing housing stipends and subsidising loan repayment plans for clinical psychologists who are dedicated to working in our own communities creates a positive way forward for Oregon citizens, families, and communities.

I urge you to support SB 581, as it creates a solution to the shortage of psychologists in Oregon, and works to ensure psychologists in Oregon practice with cultural humility and attention to the diverse needs of others.