

Submitter: Jessica Porter

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5525

My name is Jessica Porter and I am with the Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board and the South Coast Early Learning Hub.

I want to underscore how vital our community college, Southwestern Oregon Community College, is to the health and well-being of this region.

We currently have 47 open positions for behavioral health professionals in our region. Many of these positions have been open for more than 6 months and some for over a year. That's not just a workforce gap, it's a community crisis. It's imperative that we acknowledge that these aren't just numbers; they represent families, youth, and individuals who need care and support, and can't access it.

Despite not having any startup funding, SWOCC saw the urgency and stepped up, launching a Behavioral Health program this fall with 11 students. They hired an instructor for a full year to build curriculum, and now that program is preparing students for careers in mental health, addiction recovery, case management, social work, and community health. Students can earn a 1-year certificate or a 2-year degree, and those completing the degree can register as Qualified Mental Health Associates, which is critical for meeting workforce needs quickly.

This is exactly the kind of nimble, responsive partnership we need—one that builds local talent to meet local needs.

With sustained investment and support, community colleges can continue being the front line of our workforce solution.

Thank you.