

# WALDEN UNIVERSITY

*A higher degree. A higher purpose.*

Statement by Dr. Tracy Marsh, Walden University College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Program Director, Counseling Psychology Program

Before the 77<sup>th</sup> Oregon Legislative Assembly

*HB 4002 – Educational and training qualifications necessary to be licensed to practice psychology*

February 7th, 2014

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee. My name is Dr. Tracy Marsh and I am the Program Director for the Counseling Psychology Doctoral Degree Program at Walden University.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer my support for House Bill 4002. HB 4002 would modify existing educational qualifications to enable graduates of regionally accredited institutions to apply for licensure as a psychologist in Oregon. The enactment of this Bill would assist Oregon in succeeding in two major initiatives: increasing educational attainment rates, and improving mental health care services.

In 2011, The Legislature enacted SB253, or the “40-40-20 Goal”, which put Oregon at the forefront of education change. The law will require that 40% of adults hold a bachelor’s degree or higher by 2025. That represents a 40% increase from today’s levels. Such significant growth must come not only from existing, traditional institutions, but from new and innovative sources that are uniquely equipped to serve the needs of non-traditional students or those otherwise unable to attend a traditional university. During a 2011 leadership symposium sponsored by the Oregon University system, OUS Chancellor George Pernsteiner noted that universities need to do markedly better at serving every student through

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graduation, particularly low-income students, first generation students, students of color, and rural Oregonians.

By enacting HB 4002, more qualified institutions would be enabled to educate and train a diverse body of individuals, contributing to the needed 40% increase in bachelor's and higher educational degrees.

Walden University supports House Bill (HB) 4002 – a bill that will assure equality of opportunity for students who either choose or are required, for a variety of personal or financial reasons, to pursue a substantial portion of their higher education on-line. Furthermore, Walden has consistently contributed to the “40-40-20 goals” by charging tuition rates comparable to the in-state tuition rates of Oregon State University. Nearly one-half of Walden’s students are ethnic minority, over 90% work full time, part-time, or are self-employed, and 77% are women. Our mission of broad access has allowed us to become a leader in providing education to non-traditional, typically underserved adults.

With regard to mental health services, the Oregon Health Authority reports that one in eight children, and one in 18 adults in Oregon suffer from mental illness. Last year, Senate President Peter Courtney noted that “*nearly two-thirds of young Oregonians who need mental health services aren’t getting them,*” and he called on members of the Oregon Legislature to “*make a game changing increase in funding for community mental health services in Oregon a top revenue and budget priority.*”

In a Department of Justice report released last month, officials cited the State’s continued reliance on expensive, in-residence facilities, the lack of intensive community based services, that the quantity of services does not meet evidence based models for quality, and a general concern regarding overall lack of data and program evaluation and improvement.

The changes needed require not just an infusion of funding, but also require enough properly trained and qualified individuals to implement, evaluate and evolve such programs. Doctoral-level licensed psychologists are uniquely qualified to provide such services, as their training is not limited to therapeutic interventions, but also includes psychological assessment, program evaluation, supervision, consultation, and advanced research skills.

Currently, there are only three American Psychological Association (APA)-accredited doctoral programs in psychology in Oregon; two within communities surrounding Portland, and one in Eugene. These locations do not serve the nearly 30% of the population that live in rural areas. Walden University's doctoral programs are specifically intended to serve those who for whatever reason are unable to attend these three doctoral programs, and others like them in other states.

Unfortunately, Walden University is prevented from seeking programmatic accreditation for its doctoral psychology programs from the American Psychological Association (APA) because APA's Commission on Accreditation (CoA) adopted a regulation in 2010 that prohibits programs that are "fully or substantially online" from applying. Just last month, APA reconfirmed, and in fact, strengthened their stance against substantially online programs in a draft of the new Accreditation standards. This position is not consistent with the vast body of research that supports the efficacy of blended and online learning, as equal to and sometimes a bit superior to traditional face-to-face learning, and is out of step with most other accrediting bodies that have no such prohibition.

## Conclusion

Walden is committed to providing access to education, especially for students who are nontraditional, and underserved or living in rural areas. We look forward to the continued leadership of the Oregon

Legislative Assembly to ensure that all students in the state of Oregon have access to higher education programs in the psychology discipline and eventual psychology licensing after graduation, and that all individuals have access to quality, evidence based mental health care.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

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