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To: Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Candalynn Johnson

RE: SB 231

Hello Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Olsen, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Candalynn Johnson and I am a student at Oregon State University. I am one of many students who identify as neurodivergent and have been diagnosed with severe ADHD since I was in 1st grade. I got through school by teaching myself how to develop skills and habits to deal with the fact that my brain works differently. If it is one thing many can agree on it is that this system is not set up for people who work differently. My sister however, has not been so lucky, she goes to Linn-Benton Community College where there is a disability center that allows students to sign up to have a note taker in their classroom or to take tests outside the classroom, but does not provide mental health counseling or many other services that students experiencing mental health crisis need. She was told that she couldn't be put in a special program in high school until she failed and the high school wouldn't let her fail. So, she slid by and made it to college, but didn't know how to learn because no one ever taught her correctly. She went to tutoring and started to seek help for her learning disability and depression outside the classroom, but because she can't drive, my father had to give her a ride to everything. My father also is going back to school and has been seeking counseling for his ADHD to try and develop study habits that he never learned as a high school dropout. Because my sister and dad were forced to seek help and counseling for their learning disabilities outside of the school, my sister ended up only going part time while my they sought the help they needed. When my grandmother became ill last year, my dad could no longer take my sister to counselling due to many trips to the hospital and eventually hospice and she failed her class dropping her financial aid. My dad also failed his classes that term and decided to drop out for a term to try and pay out of pocket for my sister to continue trying to attend school. I keep thinking what would help her succeed? If she was at OSU she could get counseling, but she wouldn't last academically, but the fact is that without counseling and proper mental health services she didn't make it academically at LBCC either, so it really comes down to access and amount of mental health services provided to students.

When you find out you have a mental health problem early in life you have years to develop and learn coping mechanisms and work around it to be perfectly functioning, but many college students do not find out that they have a diagnosable mental health disease until they enter college. Mental health issues are a leading impediment to academic success among college students. Untreated mental illness in the college student population — including depression, ADHD, anxiety and eating disorders — is associated with lower GPA and lower retention rates. Treatment is effective and available, yet because of an unnecessary shame surrounding these issues, mental health is not discussed or funded at the rate of many other services on our campus.



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According to Active Minds, a nonprofit organization that aims to break down stigmas about mental illness on college campuses, an estimated 26 percent of Americans ages 18 and older – or about 1 in 4 adults - live with a diagnosable mental health disorder and at Oregon State a study was done to find that it is closer to 1 in 3 students attending OSU. Students are in desperate need of mental health resources and support and that only increases with the building stress that students face in trying to survive financially and eat properly. This is an issue of access and equity for students who are neurodivergent, students with disabilities, and students who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

This bill brings stakeholders together to do research and come up with solutions for the 2019 session; this task force is needed to have a serious conversation about what needs to be done and what is possible to implement at our institutions in order to decrease the number of students dropping out of college due to mental illness and increasing graduation rates.

That is why I urge you to support SB 231 and help us find ways to better give students the services they need to thrive.