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To: Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Lina deMorais

RE: SB 231

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

My name is Lina deMorais and I am a student at Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC).

I am also a type I bipolar.

Even though I see my condition as an intrinsic part of who I am, it does not come without its challenges. I struggle with many aspects of life that my neurotypical peers often take for granted. Some nights are spent wide awake, fighting thoughts of self-harm and worthlessness. Some days I can't make it to class because the thought of even leaving my house is terrifying and unbearable. And almost every moment of my life is spent battling crippling anxiety, which is truly exhausting.

Those are the kinds of struggles that often prevent neurodivergent students like me from succeeding in higher education.

To better understand what factors in students' lives may be influencing their academic performance, LBCC conducted a survey on its student body in the spring of 2013. Within that survey was a section devoted to assessing the stressors and mental health issues that students were experiencing. They were asked to select the issues that have impacted their college performance in the previous 12 months.

The results, while shocking to some, are of no surprise to those of us whose existence is marred by struggles with mental health and general wellbeing. While the entirety of the survey is worthy of attention, there are a few statistics that I think are especially important to share right now.

For starters, in contrast with the "1 in 4" statistic we hear thrown around when discussing mental illness, the LBCC survey found that close to half of the surveyed population (~41%) felt depression so severe that it was "difficult to function" and ~51% reported experiencing "overwhelming anxiety".

But perhaps the most concerning statistic was the fact that while almost 11% of those surveyed reported seriously considering suicide, alarmingly, less than 8% of ALL respondents received mental health services from the college's Counseling or Health Services.

I myself have attempted college 4 times now and have failed 3 out of those 4 times. These past few years have been the most successful of my academic career, and the biggest



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difference now is that I have a support system through my school's Center for Accessibility Resources (CFAR). The tools and skills I have learned through the accommodations provided by those services have allowed me to be more successful academically and professionally than I ever thought possible. Something all Oregon students deserve.

However, as testimonies during this hearing have indicated, very few students are even aware that such resources exist on our campus.

The truth is that the existence of these resources is not enough if students aren't aware of them. And without clear cut parameters on how to best assist students, our resource centers are also struggling.

It is my firm belief that the Mental Health Task Force being discussed here today is an essential step towards making higher education accessible and equitable for all Oregonians, even those of us who don't fall neatly within the bell curve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.