



May 1, 2017

The Honorable Laurie Monnes Anderson
900 Court St. NE, S-211
Salem, OR, 97301

RE: HB2751 Allows occupational therapists to participate in the Oregon primary care provider loan repayment program.

Dear Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Health Care Committee:

The faculty of the School of Occupational Therapy (OT) at Pacific University respectfully requests your support and active engagement to implement HB2751 that *allows occupational therapists to participate in the Oregon primary care provider loan repayment program*. Former Representative Bob Jenson (District 58 Pendleton) introduced the initial bill in 2015 (HB2048) in response to the challenge to recruit occupational therapists to fill positions in his and other rural districts of Oregon. That year, the bill stalled in the House Health Care Committee given that stakeholders requested further research to study the extent of the need. The current bill (HB2751) was re-introduced by Representative Greg Barreto (Rep. Ben Jenson's successor) and has passed the House with 55 votes in favor.

There is a verified shortage of occupational therapists nationwide, and in Oregon, particularly in rural areas, despite the fact that Pacific University, the only University in Oregon that graduates occupational therapists, has increased its enrollment of OT students annually over the past nine years. In addition, the School for Occupational Therapy Assistants program at Linn-Benton College, initiated in 2011, graduates a growing number of OT Assistants. Yet, there remains the challenge of attracting these new graduates to serve in rural areas or to pursue jobs at facilities recognized by the Health Resources and Service Administration as having shortages of primary care and mental health providers for underserved populations. See Appendix A.

One of the greatest deterrents to entering rural practice or pursuing career opportunities with underserved populations is the high educational loan debt that graduates accumulate and must repay. The national average wage of allied health professions is 12% lower in nonmetropolitan areas compared to metropolitan areas (National Rural Health Association Policy Brief, 2012). Approximately 15% of graduate and professional school students graduate with a six-figure student loan debt (Wall Street Journal May 16, 2014). New graduates with loan debt are forced to take higher paying jobs in metropolitan areas.

Rural counties are more likely to report fair to poor health: 19.5% rural counties compared to 15.6% urban counties (National Rural Health Association, 2011). Rural Americans tend to be older and less well insured; and chronic disease prevalence, infant and maternal morbidity, mental illness, environmental and occupational, are higher in rural communities (National Rural Health Association Policy Brief, 2012).



School of Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapists can help. Occupational therapy is a healthcare profession that “maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living.”¹

Occupational therapy services are associated with fewer hospital admissions⁷, shorter hospital stays⁶, improved health outcomes^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8}, injury prevention⁶, improved chronic illness management², fewer nursing home admissions^{4,8}, and the improved ability for older adults to age in place^{3,4,5,8}.

Adoption of HB2751, that would allow occupational therapists to participate in the primary care provider loan repayment program, is a critical first step to improve access to OT services for Oregonians in need of occupational therapy services. Benefits include: increased service to rural areas and underserved populations; stronger hiring and retention leverage for rural employers; and an avenue to infuse underserved areas and facilities with new graduates that are freshly trained in evidence-based state of the art practice.

We urge you to support HB2751 and proactively assist to successfully move it through the legislative process.

Respectfully,

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CC: Members of the Senate Committee on Health

Vice-Chair Senator Jeff Kruse

Member Senator Lee Beyer

Member Senator Tim Knopp

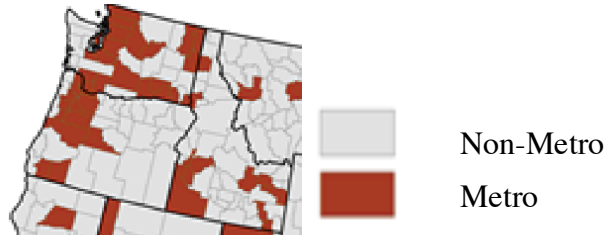
Member Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward

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- ⁷ Rogers, A. T., Bai, G., Lavin, R. A., & Anderson, G. F. (2016, September 2). Higher hospital spending on occupational therapy is associated with lower readmission rates. *Medical Care Research and Review*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077558716666981>
- ⁸ Szanton, S. L., Leff, B., Wolff, J. L., Roberts, L., & Gitlin, N. (2016). Home-based care program reduces disability and promotes aging in place. *Health Affairs*, 35, 1558-1563. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0140>

APPENDIX A

The majority of Oregon's 36 counties are considered rural or non-metropolitan.



Number of Occupational Therapists (OT) and Occupational Therapy Assistants in Frontier vs. Rural vs. Mixed Urban/Rural Counties

Eleven counties have fewer than 5 OT practitioners and 4 counties have no OT practitioners.

Frontier Counties			Rural Counties			Mixed Urban/Rural		
	<u>OT</u>	<u>OTA</u>		<u>OT</u>	<u>OTA</u>		<u>OT</u>	<u>OTA</u>
Baker	4	0	Clatsop	15	2	Benton	34	7
Gilliam	0	0	Columbia	4	1	Clackamas	143	42
Grant	1	0	Coos	21	8	Deschutes	88	9
Harney	0	0	Crook	2	0	Jackson	84	18
Lake	1	1	Curry	5	3	Lane	102	27
Malheur	2	5	Douglas	24	6	Linn	16	22
Morrow	1	0	Hood Riv	16	0	Marion	74	23
Sherman	0	0	Jefferson	2	0	Multnomah	430	76
Wallowa	1	0	Josephine	17	7	Polk	28	5
Wheeler	0	0	Klamath	12	3	Washington	195	30
			Lincoln	7	0	Yamhill	29	7
			Tillamook	4	6			
			Umatilla	8	5			
			Union	4	4			
			Wasco	6	4			