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Governor



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Testimony in support of HB 2941
March 20, 2019, Hearing Room F, 3:00 p.m.
House Committee on Education

Chair Doherty, Vice Chairs Alonso Leon, and Helt, Representatives Hernandez, Neron, Reardon, Reschke, Sollman, and Wallan:

For the record, I am Dr. Joseph Gallegos, I am and have been a professor and administrator of mental health training programs for over forty years. I am a member and long-time supporter of the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs. I am here today for the Chairs of the Advocacy Commissions representing our support for HB 2941 that Directs Higher Education Coordinating Commission to require each mental health provider preparation program in this state to prepare plan to recruit and graduate diverse mental health providers.

That marginalized groups receive disparate mental health services is common knowledge. The consequences of these mental health disparities are severe: Early childhood trauma leads to depression and suicide. (Oregon Health Authority. (2014, October 29). *2015-2018 Behavioral Health Strategic Plan*); and Incomplete education leads to poor physical health, anxiety and depression. (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2018). *Disconnected Youth*.) The Legislative Joint Student Success Committee recently reported that there is a student mental health crisis in Oregon's public schools. There is a great need for bilingual and bicultural mental health professionals who can address the needs of diverse communities in Oregon.

The 2017 Latino MH Study, conducted jointly by the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA), OHA and DHS showed that of 10,000 Latino individuals accessing MH services over five years statewide, that schools are the primary referral point, and that Latino youth accessed therapy at a median age of 17, whereas the total population's median age to access was 29 years. In Oregon, Latinos make up 13% of the population, and the population is increasing: 1 in 4 students enrolled in the Oregon public school system is Latino. Oregon Department of Education. (2018). *Student Enrollment Reports*.

One MH provider in urban Oregon serves more than 500 individuals. More providers are needed, especially providers who look like the individuals they serve and are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon have been impacted by national immigration issues, and immigrant families are experiencing trauma at a higher level, increasing the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health providers.

Latino mental health professionals interviewed statewide agree that more diverse mental health providers with better education and training models are needed to serve the current population. And the population is growing at a faster rate than the general population. If this need is not addressed now, the results could mean critical costs to the state in human services and in an inadequate future workforce.

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Sincerely,



Joseph Gallegos, MSW, PhD.
OCHA Commissioner



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