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Governor



**Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs**

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Testimony in Support of HB 2941  
March 20, 2019, 3 pm, Hearing Room D  
House Committee on Education

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

For the record, my name is Gustavo Morales, and I am Executive Director of EUVALCREE, based in Ontario. As a member of the Commission on Hispanic Affairs, I respectfully urge you to support HB 2941 that Directs Higher Education Coordinating Commission to require each mental health provider preparation program in this state to prepare a plan to recruit and graduate diverse mental health providers.

Mental health has been one of the most difficult community issues to address that has resulted in having some of the greatest impacts on social, educational and physical outcomes for members of our community. Members of our community often turn to coping mechanisms that result in substance abuse. Mental health is the opportunity for members of the community to receive the support they need to address current and past traumas, incidents and receive guidance and support.

Although the following stories are recent, there are many people living in Oregon who experienced similar traumas years ago, who have been without benefit of mental health services. A woman in her mid-30s came to EUVALCREE seeking support for her and her four year-old daughter. She and her daughter fled El Salvador with only the clothes on her back because her husband was murdered and she and her young daughter violated. The mother was able to get shelter and healthcare services, and three weeks later learned she was pregnant. She is now raising her two little ones. She is resilient, but has no access to mental health care.

The other story is about a mother and six children, under the age of 18. Their father was murdered and they fled Mexico for asylum. The kids are in need of mental health services because of this trauma. Some of these family members try to cope through substance abuse, as a means of dealing with their trauma. Neither of these families have been able to receive mental health services. They are in need of mental health services, and more providers who are bicultural and bilingual are needed.

The Hispanic population is largest minority population in Oregon and continues to grow. According to the 2017 Latino Mental Health Study, conducted jointly by the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs, Oregon Health Authority and Department of Human Services, showed that 10,000 Latino individuals accessed Mental Health services over five-year period statewide. The median age of Latino youth that accessed therapy was 17 years of age, compared to total population at 29 years of age. Schools were the primary referral point for these 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 high need for individuals who can address the bilingual and bicultural needs of diverse communities in Oregon. The need is exacerbated in Oregon’s rural areas.

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Morrow, Malheur, Hood River and Umatilla counties in our rural communities have the highest Latino concentration. One mental health provider in rural Oregon serves more than 1,000 individuals. We need more providers, especially providers who can serve with the culturally and linguistically appropriate needs that face our communities.

Immigrant and refugee communities across Oregon are being impacted by the high level of national rhetoric around immigration. The number of youth, especially those of color and their families that are impacted by trauma has skyrocketed, escalating the need for these services.

The consequences of these mental health disparities are severe. Research reports and includes early childhood trauma which leads to depression and suicide; and incomplete education which results in poor physical health, anxiety and depression.

As a great state, we need to become proactive in the efforts to support our communities from the growing epidemic of mental health. This is not just about mental health, this is about the future, the future of our communities and the future of our great state. We need to have strong leaders who can support our communities where they are at and in spaces where they are most vulnerable.

For these reasons I strongly urge the Education Committee to support HB 2941. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,



Gustavo Morales, Member



Irma Linda Castillo, Chair

## References

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