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School of Nursing

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Members of the Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education:

Thank you so much for holding these listening sessions to better understand how to support underrepresented students in higher education. I am writing, as a nursing faculty who has supported projects to enhance nursing workforce diversity, to provide testimony and offer my suggestions to support underrepresented student success.

Nursing, nationally and within Oregon, is a predominantly white female profession. The most recent data from 2020 Oregon Health Authority Public Use Nursing Workforce Data File indicated that 6.2% of the current registered nursing (RN) workforce identify as underrepresented as defined in ORS 342.120 compared to 17.9% of the population. In particular, nurses of Latinx identity are significantly underrepresented at 3.9% of the RN workforce compared with 13.4% of the population. The Native American population in Oregon is estimated to be about 1.8% and there is a gap in the RN workforce with approximately 0.5% of Oregon RNS identifying as Native American. Lastly, there is also an underrepresentation in the black nursing and advance practice nursing workforce. Nursing workforce diversity is critical in resolving health inequities through providing diverse perspectives to improve problem solving abilities. All students/employees can benefit from working in diverse teams that provide more diverse perspectives in thinking. Diversity, equity, and inclusion increases the talent pool of nurses and can create a more equitable future for students historically unrepresented in nursing. Diversity brings different talents and perspectives not otherwise provided in homogeneity.

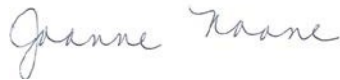
From 2013- 2016, I was program manager and, from 2017-2021, I became program director for a federal Nursing Workforce Diversity grant Advancing Health Equity through Student Empowerment & Professional Success (HealthE STEPS). The purpose of this program was to address social determinants of health to enroll, empower, and graduate nursing students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve health equity within their communities through professional nursing practice. A comprehensive model was developed of evidence-based individual strategies to improve nursing workforce diversity and build capacity to advance health equity in the state of Oregon by focusing on the following social determinants of education of student success: 1) educational opportunity; 2) economic stability; 3) socioeconomic opportunity; 4) inclusive learning environment; and, 5) multi-cultural, health equity curricular framework. **The success of this grant was demonstrated by an increase in underrepresented minority students in our undergraduate nursing programs from a 12% at baseline in 2011 to 27% in 2021 at all five campuses of OHSU School of Nursing statewide.** There was excellent retention and graduation rates with entry into the nursing workforce in Oregon comparable to outcomes for all students.

With this background, please consider these recommendations to support underrepresented student success.

- Thank you so much for passing legislation such as OHSU's recent 30-30-30 proposal. Such funding measures can financially support underrepresented students. Please consider how these can be expanded to provide additional tuition support, support loan forgiveness, and financial debt counseling.
- Please consider supporting programs with demonstrated success at improving diversity, such as OHSU's HealthE STEPs program at the OHSU School of Nursing and the Northwest Native American Center of Excellence at the OHSU School of Medicine.
- I also recommend expanding support for underrepresented nurses to become nurse educators, including scholarships and loan forgiveness programs. A lack of faculty diversity may contribute to diverse students' sense of isolation. Increasing the diversity of the nurse educator workforce in Oregon will help create an inclusive campus environment where all nursing students can see themselves and feel they belong.

Again, thank you so much for serving on this important taskforce and your willingness to listen to and read our testimony.

Sincerely,



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