

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and members of the committee,

My name is Kristen Wils and I am part of the Scholars for a Healthy Oregon Initiative (SHOI). SHOI is an OHSU program that offers full tuition and fees to a select number of students in exchange for at least five years of medical service in a rural or underserved part of Oregon.

For a long time, I wanted to pursue medical school, but didn't think I'd be able to. Of course, I worried about being accepted, but, even after my acceptance, I worried about how to afford my education. I learned about the SHOI scholarship when I interviewed at OHSU, after also pursuing a military medical career as an alternative method of paying. I grew up in Salem, went to undergraduate at Lewis and Clark in Portland, and have spent the last six years living, working, and attending school in Klamath Falls. I always planned to eventually practice in Oregon, but my considerations of what that practice might look like have been significantly influenced by the SHOI scholarship. I currently hope to return to rural Oregon to practice Family Medicine. I'm hoping, like in Klamath Falls, that I'll be able to work with local public health programs and Tribal Health programs to improve the health and wellness of my whole community. Without the SHOI funding, I would have had to spend more time considering how much a job or specialty might pay me, and less time considering where I could have the greatest impact.

Rural and underserved areas lack access to care, and without the SHOI program, it would be nearly impossible for underpopulated and underserved areas to attract talented doctors. Coupled with the cost of medical school and the sometimes lower pay in these areas, taking jobs in rural or underserved areas without financial assistance would result in significant debt for providers.

There are hundreds of qualified Oregonians who are willing to serve in rural and underserved Oregon, but if the funding for SHOI is cut, then we know that these areas of our state will feel the effects. As we begin our road to recovery from the pandemic, we cannot afford to leave underserved populations behind.

We urge you to fully fund the Scholars for a Healthy Oregon Initiative so we can continue to serve some of the communities that need it the most.

Sincerely,

Kristen Wils
OHSU Class of 2024