

**Kate Brown**  
Governor



**Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs**

“Advocating Equality and Diversity”

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Testimony in support, HB 2361  
House Committee on Behavioral Health  
Monday, March 3, 2021, 8 am

Chair Rep. Sanchez, Vice-Chair Rep. Moore-Green, Vice Chair Rep. Nosse, and Representatives Lively, Morgan, Reynolds, Salinas, Sollman, and Wright:

For the record my name is Linda Castillo and I am the chair of the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA). OCHA’s statutory work includes advocating for the Latino community in Oregon. OCHA strongly supports HB 2361, providing incentives for students and professionals in culturally responsive Latino Mental Health and Behavioral Health practicing in counties designated as areas of shortage. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important culturally responsive workforce shortage bill. It was proposed by OCHA and sponsored by Representative Salinas as part of OCHA’s 2021 seminal study: [Crisis de Nuestro Bienestar: A Report on Latino Mental Health in Oregon](#) with OHA, DHS, and Community Stakeholders.

In this pandemic we have all been further sensitized to the urgent need not only for physical health but the grave consequences of not addressing and caring for our mental health. Our frontline and essential workers come in all professional and workforce capacities. We know that essential workers such as farmworkers, factory workers, Covid sanitation staff and other essential workers in the Latino community and their families are harder hit by the inequities of and access to quality healthcare.

HB 2361 provides a concrete solution to increasing mental health providers in counties that must be considered MH shortage areas with much needed incentives for culturally responsive behavioral health services to Latino, Latina and Latinx individuals living in Morrow, Malheur, Hood River and Umatilla counties. Often these providers are not easily accessible or available and those that are have overwhelmingly high caseloads. Given the need for cultural and linguistic competence, these culturally complex cases deserve more qualified providers and balancing of their caseloads. In a recent article in the Malheur Enterprise, local leaders and voices from the Latino community there commented on these issues. I have a link to it below.\*

\*<https://www.malheurenterprise.com/posts/8181/report-obstacles-complicate-latinos-access-to-mental-health-services>

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The Latino populations in Malheur (33.4%), Morrow (37.0%), Hood River (31.9%) and Umatilla (26.4%) Counties are the fastest growing Latino communities in Oregon. HB 2361 aligns with OHA's goals, helping the healthcare provider system keep pace and prioritize the healthcare provider access program to recruit, incentivize, and grow the available qualified mental health workforce. The [study](#) revealed the high need to serve these communities that are facing toxic stresses in their homes and communities. We have an opportunity to incentivize the system to build and sustain an equitable health care and especially mental health care for Oregon's Hispanic communities.

In Jackson County, the communities of Talent and Phoenix experienced devastating wildfire destruction of homes that affected a significant number of Latinx agricultural workers. Many families lost their homes, jobs, and school life was disrupted. All these losses had and are having negative effects on the mental health of affected individuals and their communities. Supporting the increase of credentialed mental health professional providers in Oregon's rural areas will ensure that all Oregonians will have a fair chance to reach their potential and make for more productive communities.

OCHA thanks the committee for their positive consideration of HB 2361.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Irma Linda Castillo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Irma Linda Castillo, Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joseph Gallegos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Joseph Gallegos, Commission member