

Chair Nosse, vice-chairs Goodwin and Nelson, for the record my name is Janelle Bynum, and I am the State Representative for House District 39. I provide this testimony today in support of House Bill 2652 and the proposed – 1 amendment.

I believe we are in a rare moment of bipartisan understanding that the most pressing issues facing our state are impacting Oregonians from all walks of life. Of these shared concerns health and human services is at the top of the list. To address our current shortcomings, it is paramount that we target investments to localities most in need and provide county governments the ability to develop their own strategies to address their specific needs.

House Bill 2652 empowers counties to declare health and human services workforce shortages and receive funding from OHA to address local shortfalls. Flexibility is a driving consideration in this legislation. The grounds under which a county can declare a shortage is extensive to ensure that all localities in need can access funds, with special consideration given to rural counties.

Counties can use funds either directly in their role as a public sector employer, or they can award grants to private employers and educational institutions. The – 1 amendment provides a long list of the type of providers who can benefit; including but not limited to homeless service workers, nurses, peer support providers, social workers, and veterinarians.

As to the actual workforce incentives provided for in this bill, it is notable that the financial benefits providers can receive are excluded from their legally defined “compensation.” Doing so ensures that employees fully retain the incentives provided for under the program. Our public and private employers are telling us that they are ready to offer bonuses and other financial benefits to attract new employees; it is our job as lawmaker is to ensure these benefits reach workers to the fullest extent possible.

Lastly, as I am sure most of my colleagues who have served with me know, I take very seriously the health and future of our children. In alignment with this value, this bill creates a new program for counties to partner with school districts to design, implement and evaluate programming relating to healthy eating, mental health, and physical activity. To solve our current predicament, we must address both our present needs, and build a foundation for our future. This program and the financial incentives provided for to incentivize students to enter the health and human services field will build a workforce for the future.

Colleagues, I urge you to support House Bill 2652.