



February 6, 2023

Chair Noose and Members of the Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care,

We are writing today to express our support for HB 2485, which will enhance mental health and addiction workforce in Oregon by expanding opportunities at Portland State University's School of Social Work.

When the HereTogether coalition developed and passed the region wide Supportive Housing Services measure, we knew that addressing homelessness at a scale that matches the scope of the crisis in the Portland Metro region would require not just greater resources, but a workforce to meet challenges.

Social workers and case managers are the frontline heroes of our state's response to homelessness. Every day they work tirelessly to meet the unique and dynamic needs of our most vulnerable residents. Social workers help people who are homeless and/or experiencing behavioral health challenges build trust with clients, identify barriers, navigate systems and help them transition to stable, permanent housing.

We need more social workers in our community and HereTogher has long advocated for more abundant and available resources, higher wages and training programs to help grow and retain this critical workforce.

Passage of HB 2485 will allow Portland State to take on an additional 100 students a year in their social work program. Currently, over 200 talented and qualified students are turned away due to capacity constraints. The bill will increase the number of faculty and student supports available at Portland State. These additional students will allow Oregon to serve more individuals with behavioral health needs.

HB 2485 represents part of a multi-pronged approach to supporting behavioral health services that will improve our community's overall wellbeing. Oregon's behavioral health system needs this, and our community needs this.

Please join us in supporting HB 2485.

Sincerely,

Cole Merkel and Angela Martin
Co-Directors, HereTogether

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HereTogether—a 250+ member coalition comprising service providers, business leaders, faith leaders, advocates and more—strives to create a Portland metro region where homelessness is rare and brief by advocating for near term and permanent solutions, systems change and accountability necessary to effectively scale up resources and serve our most vulnerable neighbors.