



Oregon Commission on Black Affairs

Advocating for Equity and Diversity throughout Oregon

Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and Members of the Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care,

For the record, my name is Ben Duncan, and I serve as a Commissioner on the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs (OCBA).

OCBA serves the people of Oregon to empower and support the African American and Black communities through our special roles as policy advisors to Oregon state policy makers and leaders. OCBA is a catalyst that empowers partnerships between state government and our community in rural and urban areas to ensure success for all African American and Black Oregonians by addressing longstanding and emerging issues at the policy level including but not limited to social, political, legal, and economic equity. OCBA has several statutory duties, all of which revolve around advocacy and equity.

I am writing today in support of House Bill 2485, which would require Portland State University to enhance the state's capacity to educate public mental health and addiction treatment providers by materially increasing number of graduates from relevant degree programs.

My professional background both through my career and in this moment has had direct intersections with public mental health and addiction treatment needs for communities broadly, and specifically those involved in our criminal legal system, the overwhelming relationships and needs for these services for our houseless populations, and the dearth of providers who can meet the needs for Black Oregonians.

While I wholeheartedly acknowledge that increasing investments and improving access to schools of social work, a dire professional need across our state; I also strongly encourage the legislature to examine how to think about the culturally specific needs of populations and the disparities in access to higher education for communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, and others who are often left with providers who do not understand and who do not have the lived shared experiences of these communities.

In the Black community, the stigma of mental health and behavioral health interventions is slowly chipping away. And yet, the lack of Black social workers and clinicians leaves a real hole in our system for some of our most over-represented and underserved communities across our state. This is compounded by and supported by literature demonstrating bias and racism in health delivery, and the very real need for many Black patients to have to educate their providers on issues of racism, microaggressions, and other daily experiences related specifically to the lived reality of being Black.

**Oregon Commission on
Black Affairs**

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This is encouraging and a necessary investment to address long standing needs, and with some direction, specificity and intention around culturally specific provider recruitment and retention, could be stronger and provide a much-needed resource for Black Oregonians.


I wholeheartedly support the passage of House Bill 2485 and urge the members of the committee to vote yes.


A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Duncan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent "D" at the end.

Ben Duncan
On behalf of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs



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