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Good Afternoon,

My name is Dr. Mark Browning. I am the CEO/President of Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton Oregon, Umatilla County.

I stand in strong support of SB 523. Blue Mountain (BMCC) is an institution which holds 61 years of service to the people of Umatilla, Morrow, Baker, Union, Wallowa and Grant counties. Access to quality health care in northeast Oregon is crucial. Access begins with our hospitals and clinics having qualified, trained and credentialed nurses. BMCC's RN program has earned wide acclaim for its diligence in preparing nurses for the rigor found in daily nursing. What our program does not have is the ability to complete the process. The demand for all nurses is acute but in particular- nurses who hold a Bachelors of Science in Nursing. Currently, when our students graduate, they must either leave in order to complete that final step; the BSN. Or- they opt to do it online via an expensive out-of-state school such as Western Governor's. Either way they choose--when students leave eastern Oregon, Pendleton in particular, for school—they don't come back. Statewide data shows that students who more and more have seemingly local ties; they own a house, they have kids in school- when they are forced to either choose a much more expensive option like Western Governor's University, or relocate to take their coursework. Either way the money they spend with WGU leaves or the student AND their money leave if they choose the relocation option.

Our local and regional communities need these students here. These students need increased access to the BSN option. Better career potential, along with increased pay await those nurses who hold the BSN credential. Last year, of the graduating cohort of 16 nurses at BMCC, all 16 were either enrolled or planned to enroll shortly at the time of graduation. If we are serious about closing equity gaps for underserved populations, we need to stop the talent train leaving our region and support our local hospitals, clinics and most importantly – our students. Please vote to provide opportunity by sending Senate Bill 523 to the floor with a do-pass recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration of this effort to support rural Oregon, its citizens and taxpayers.

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