

Submitter: Victor Chang

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB3274

Dear Committee Members,

I have been a practicing LPC in Oregon since 2005 and I have a deep and abiding interest in the mental health of all Oregonians and in particular, residents in Southern Oregon. I do not have to tell you about the state & county disparities in health outcomes or access, whether access to mental health, prevalence of addiction and mental health disorders, workforce shortage issues, suicide and overdose rates, and the like. It is not a pretty picture down in Southern Oregon and there have been systemic issues for decades.

I am currently a full-time faculty member and Clinical Coordinator in SOU's Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) program and from this vantage point, I know the CMHC program serves our region tremendously by graduating a cohort of counseling students every year, ready to fulfill their mission to serve the mental health needs of the population, and for many students, in particular those needs of the traditionally underserved whether LGBTQ+ youth, or racial/ethnic minoritized peoples, or rural and isolated Southern Oregonians. We need more counselors in Southern Oregon, working with living wage and realistic working conditions, whether in private practice or in agency settings.

SOU's ability to increase the number of CMHC graduates is directly related to funding and state support as it takes funds to grow a program and sustain such growth. As you're well aware of our current financial climate, it's hard to plan for growth in the midst of historical budgetary cuts. And yet the needs remain. I am also very well aware of the mental health needs of K-12 students in our region- I moved here in 2005 to helm the growing school-based mental health services at La Clinica. I've also been the director of counseling at SOU and talk with many teachers, administrators, parents and professional colleagues about the shortages of counselors and therapists serving children and adolescents. Also, from my vantage point on the Ashland School Board, I've certainly heard a lot about the needs, some of which has been addressed via the SIA funding, generously provided by the State.

However, whether in agencies or schools, the workforce shortage remains dire. SOU's CMHC program stands ready and willing to do whatever we can to increase the behavioral health/mental health workforce in Southern Oregon and the state funds from HB 3274 would be incredibly well invested by us, if it passes.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Victor Chang, PhD LPC