

March 21, 2023

Representative Rob Nosse
Chair, Behavioral Health and Healthcare Committee
Oregon House of Representatives
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Nosse and Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to note in writing my strong support for House Bill 3274.

I write to you as a resident of Southern Oregon (Ashland), a mom, and from my experience as a director on the Ashland School Board.

I have a chance to interact with youth who come from many different areas and backgrounds. In our local community and beyond, we have seen the incline of young people whose struggles with mental health rival those of adults in our community. Anxiety, depression, dual diagnoses (substance abuse/mental health), and suicidal ideation/attempts have become more common among youth. **Our community recently lost a young person to suicide, which had a ripple effect throughout our community and even influenced other youth. These tragic events affected the whole community.** The life-altering effects of the pandemic and the effects of recent fires, from which we are still recovering, have left an indelible mark on the people of our community. This is in addition to the ongoing mental health needs and challenges the families and individuals of our community faced already.

With HB 3274, Southern Oregon University proposes establishing the Oregon Behavioral Health Institute, a center of excellence built on the existing foundation of responsiveness to the community's needs as well as SOU's excellence in its Mental Health Counseling program. With this collaborative partnership, SOU will be able to double the number of mental health practitioners graduating from this university, increasing the state's and this community's practitioners and resultant service capacity. The OBHI will facilitate the expansion of SOU's innovative Mental and Behavioral Health micro-credential—currently serving K-12 employees—to other economic sectors heavily impacted by the growing mental health crisis. Criminal justice, veteran services, and other sectors will all benefit from up-skilling front-line workers with mental and behavioral health skills. **Our families, underserved populations, the homeless, veterans, rural populations and others throughout our community and state will finally be able to get the ongoing access to the practitioners they need instead experiencing shortages, months-long waits to see a professional, triage-only care, or no support at all.**

Please vote in support of House Bill 3274. **The needs are urgent but a solution for Southern Oregon is here now, and you have the opportunity to make a small investment in exchange for big, life-changing impact—I urge you to vote in favor of HB 3274.**

Sincerely,

Sabrina Prud'homme