

Submitter: Victor Chang
On Behalf Of: Southern Oregon University
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1592

Dear Senate Committee,

I urge you to consider this bill as a significant step towards addressing the behavioral health workforce shortage and the unmet mental health needs of Oregonians. It's sadly no longer a surprise that Oregon ranks very low among the 50 states in terms of prevalence of disorders and poor access to treatment. I appreciate the past legislative fixes, such as decreasing the barriers towards licensure for counselors and some amount of OHA funding for loan repayment programs, etc. These efforts need to be sustained and coupled with additional measures aimed at addressing the high costs of graduate education and increasing the capacity of graduate training programs such as the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Southern Oregon University (which this bill does, albeit on a temporary basis). I also hope that the state is able to commit to the long-term investments necessary (see OHA latest report on the dearth of inpatient/residential treatment beds statewide) to make a dent in that aspect of unmet need. Lastly, the largest issue remains the relatively low and stagnant pay for behavioral health professionals coupled with their exceedingly stressful workloads and caseload demands. That is a larger systems issue. Hopefully, training more early professionals will help to alleviate the staffing issues and thus the extraordinary and unsustainable caseloads that our current agency clinicians are carrying, to their detriment (and possibly their clients' as well). Thank you for considering this bill and I hope it is strongly a bipartisan-supported effort that makes it to the floor for a successful vote.