



OCCA Testimony on SB 1592
Feb 5th, 2024

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber and members of the committee, for the record I'm John Wykoff, Deputy Director of the Oregon Community College Association representing Oregon's 17 community colleges. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on SB 1592.

Oregon's community colleges are an indispensable post-secondary education provider of behavioral health education and training across the state. Community colleges offer both 2-year programs leading into four-year degrees as well as short-term certificates in programs like addiction counseling certification, which places students directly into the behavioral health workforce in a short period of time.

Because these types of education and training programs are so core to the role colleges play in their local communities, we well understand the need to apply additional resources to filling this critical workforce gap. While we support the effort to do so, we are concerned that this legislation does not take a systemic approach to filling statewide behavioral health workforce needs. By singling out 5 of the 24 public institutions for funding, the state misses an opportunity to take a more comprehensive approach that reaches farther across the state.

The Oregon Community College Association would instead recommend an approach that looks to serve all regions of the state and brings to bare the geographic, student and program diversity of both the community colleges and public universities.

Such an approach could create a fund at the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to pass through to eligible community colleges and public universities with the goal of supporting behavioral health education and training across the state. We also believe the legislation could be improved by incentivizing partnerships across institutions and sectors of education.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.