

## **Testimony in Support of HB 3129**

Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Fragala and Harbick, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joseph Leykam, and I write today in strong support of HB 3129, a critical investment in Oregon's behavioral health workforce. As a licensed clinical social worker, mental health educator, and policy expert, I have spent over two decades working at the intersection of mental health service delivery, education, and workforce development.

We cannot address Oregon's ongoing behavioral health crisis without investing in the professionals who make care possible. HB 3129 does exactly that by creating a Behavioral Health Workforce Expansion Fund and directing strategic funding toward education and workforce expansion. This bill is a necessary step to ensure we have enough qualified mental health professionals to meet the growing demand for services.

### **Why HB 3129 Is Critical**

#### **1. Oregon's Mental Health Workforce is Severely Understaffed**

The demand for mental health services has never been higher, yet providers across the state report workforce shortages that leave thousands of Oregonians without care. HB 3129 will fund education and training pathways to develop a sustainable pipeline of behavioral health professionals. Without this investment, shortages will persist, and access will continue to decline.

#### **2. A Targeted, Strategic Approach to Workforce Development**

HB 3129 does more than allocate funding—it establishes a Behavioral Health Workforce Expansion Fund to oversee investment in education, training, and retention strategies. This structure ensures resources are directed where they will have the greatest impact and has the potential to focus on outcomes and actual results as opposed to the longstanding interests that have prevented real change in mental healthcare training and workforce development.

#### **3. Breaking Down Barriers to Entering the Field**

Many aspiring behavioral health professionals struggle with financial burdens, a lack of internship opportunities, and unclear career pathways. HB 3129 creates a dedicated funding mechanism to support students, training programs, and supervised clinical experiences, ensuring more people can enter and stay in the field. Limiting barriers has a proven outcome of diversifying the workforce of behavioral health professionals and, therefore, expanding our reach to traditionally underserved communities of consumers.

## Join Us in Expanding Oregon's Behavioral Health Workforce

At Oregon State University, I and several colleagues are working to expand training efforts for Oregon's next generation of behavioral health professionals. The College of Health is developing an innovative Master's in Human Development and Family Studies – Applied Mental Health Option. Our program is designed to prepare students for Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP) certification and ensure they are workforce-ready upon graduation. This adds to our College of Education's longstanding counseling program and our College of Liberal Arts's Applied Psychology training efforts.

We know that education and training are only part of the solution—students need funding, mentorship, and clear career pathways to succeed. HB 3129 provides a critical mechanism to support programs like ours and expand opportunities for future mental health professionals across the state. I invite this committee, policymakers, and community partners to join us. Expanding Oregon's behavioral health workforce requires commitment from educators, lawmakers, providers, and advocates. With HB 3129, we can make real, lasting change.

I strongly urge this committee to support and advance HB 3129 without delay. Oregon's mental health crisis will not wait—and neither should we.

Best,



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