

TO: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development  
FROM: Brent Wilder, President  
Oregon Alliance for Independent Colleges and Universities  
DATE: February 25, 2025  
RE: Testimony in Support of HB 3129

The Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities (The Alliance) is the voice of Oregon's independent, nonprofit higher education sector, actively supporting the success of our member colleges and universities, their students, and alumni.

I am writing to offer my strong support for HB 3129, which establishes the Higher Education Behavioral Health Workforce Expansion Fund. On behalf of The Alliance and our member colleges and universities, who are deeply invested in the future of Oregon's mental and behavioral health system, I believe this bill is a crucial step in ensuring that our state can meet the growing demand for qualified behavioral health professionals.

### **The Growing Need for Behavioral Health Professionals**

The demand for behavioral health professionals in Oregon continues to rise, and the need is especially pronounced in rural and underserved areas. This shortage of qualified professionals is a barrier to providing Oregonians with the care they deserve. HB 3129 will address this issue by providing the necessary funding to support the expansion of training programs, improve the retention of existing professionals, and ultimately increase the number of behavioral health workers in the state.

### **Building on Oregon's Strong Educational Foundation**

Oregon has a solid foundation in training the next generation of behavioral health professionals. Six of our member institutions—Bushnell University, Corban University, George Fox University, Lewis & Clark College, Pacific University, and Western Seminary—offer graduate programs specifically designed to meet the growing need for qualified professionals in the state. These institutions are proud to contribute to the workforce, with The Alliance granting 79% of the state's master's degrees and 83% of professional practice doctoral degrees in the area of behavioral health. In the 2022-23 academic year alone, these colleges and universities awarded 482 master's degrees and 145 doctoral degrees in fields such as psychology, mental and social health services, marriage and family therapy, mental health counseling, and more.

While these efforts are significant, there is still much work to be done to meet the growing demand for services across the state. HB 3129 will provide the necessary support to expand and strengthen these programs, ensuring that more students can be trained and retained in the behavioral health field.

### **Why HB 3129 is Essential for Oregon's Future**

By directing funds to community colleges, public universities, and private institutions, HB 3129 will help expand the capacity of these institutions to train more behavioral health professionals. It will also ensure that these trained professionals are supported and able to remain in Oregon to serve the communities that need them most. This bill provides a forward-looking solution to a workforce shortage that threatens the well-being of many Oregonians.

I urge you to support HB 3129, as it is a vital step in strengthening Oregon's mental and behavioral health system. By investing in the education and training of future behavioral health professionals, we are ensuring that our state will be equipped to address the growing mental health crisis.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.