

February 25, 2025

House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

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

RE: HB 3129 – Behavioral Health Workforce Funding for Public Higher Education Institutions

Thank you for the opportunity to share Multnomah County's support for investments in the behavioral health workforce, within the public higher education system in Oregon. Growing Oregon's statewide behavioral health workforce is listed as a priority on [Multnomah County's 2025 legislative agenda](#). We recognize that in order to provide higher quality, equitable health services for all Oregonians, critical investments are needed throughout the pipeline of Oregon's behavioral health system. This includes increasing the public behavioral health provider workforce, and building a system that is sustainable for years to come.

Currently, there are provider shortages across the state, and particularly in the public sector, due to high caseloads, a lack of affordable housing, higher-paying private sector jobs with less stress, limited child care options, and wages that are unfortunately not high enough to sustain behavioral health workers for the long-term. A recent survey of Community Mental Health Providers statewide revealed a 17% vacancy rate of positions overall, and a 29% vacancy rate for crisis service workers.

In order to build our behavioral health system to serve all Oregonians, we need to invest now in building the future. This effort should include fortifying our public higher education system with the resources it needs to train and prepare the next generation of behavioral health workers.

Thank you for your consideration of, and support for increasing resources to support our public behavioral health workforce.

Sincerely,

Lizzy Atwood Wills
State Coordinator
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