

February 26, 2025

To: Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 476. As a licensed psychologist in Oregon, I have witnessed the profound impact of our state's severe shortage of mental health professionals. This bill is a crucial step in addressing this shortage, particularly by providing a clear pathway to licensure for internationally educated individuals, like Dr. Alexander O'Bryan Tear, whose PhD from Cambridge University has not been fully recognized in Oregon's current licensure process.

Dr. O'Bryan Tear, a clinician at Options Counseling and Family Services, works with at-risk youth who are at high risk for costly and disruptive residential placements without timely therapeutic intervention. Despite his extensive clinical experience and training from a highly regarded institution, the existing licensure barriers have hindered his ability to practice fully in Oregon. Senate Bill 476 offers a remedy by requiring professional licensing boards to provide clear, culturally responsive guidance for internationally educated applicants. This guidance will help break down unnecessary barriers for professionals like Dr. O'Bryan Tear, who have the expertise to serve our communities but are currently stymied by outdated licensure requirements.

The bill also establishes the Internationally Educated Workforce Reentry Grant Program, which will provide vital support to internationally educated professionals, including behavioral health workers. By expanding access to licensure and supporting those professionals with resources such as career guidance, financial assistance, and clinical preparation, Senate Bill 476 will directly increase the availability of qualified mental health providers across Oregon.

Senate Bill 476 is not just about increasing the number of mental health professionals; it's about ensuring that those with the right qualifications and experience—regardless of where they were trained—are able to contribute to our state's mental health system. I urge you to support this bill, which will have a lasting positive impact on Oregon's workforce and the individuals and families in desperate need of care.

Thank you for considering this important legislation and for your continued support of the behavioral health services in Oregon.

Sincerely,
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