

Submitter: Nicole Bales
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Members of the Committee, my name is Nicole Bales. I'm from Warrenton and represent the Oregon Area Health Education Center, also known as Oregon AHEC. I'm here today to respectfully urge your continued support and funding for Oregon AHEC.

For 35 years, Oregon AHEC has delivered high-impact programming that supports future health care professionals from early career exploration through education and into their careers. Our work, led by five regional centers and a central office at OHSU, is rooted in a "grow-your-own" approach.

Because our centers cover every region and county in the state, each one is uniquely attuned to local needs and can tailor programming to best serve its community. We've seen meaningful successes in every region — from a high school student in Linn County who, as a single mom, relied on AHEC to help her graduate and eventually complete nursing school, to a father in Umatilla County who advanced his career through nurse practitioner training made possible by AHEC scholarships and support in forming a distance learning opportunity.

Every dollar invested in Oregon AHEC is a strategic investment in the future of Oregon's health care infrastructure. AHEC may not be a silver bullet, but it is a vital part of the solution. Without this funding, we risk losing momentum built over decades to create sustainable, community-based strategies to address Oregon's health care workforce crisis. In fact, Oregon AHEC's health career exploration camps were highlighted in the state's Health Care Workforce Needs Assessment as an exemplary program for strengthening educational and career pathways into health care.

I urge you to maintain — and if possible, increase — funding for Oregon AHEC in the state budget. This is not just a line item; it's an opportunity to change the trajectory of students' lives in every county — students who might not otherwise know how to pursue a path in health care or have the support and resources to get there.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Oregon's health.