

Testimony to Oregon Joint Ways and Means committee 3.8.25

Co-chairs Lieber and Sanchez, vice-chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and members of the Ways and Means committee:

My name is Dr. Robert Law. I am a family physician here in Astoria, where I was born and grew up. As a past president of the Oregon Academy of Family Physicians, I am advocating for SB 443 which supports family medicine residency training programs, and testifying to its importance for the state budget priorities of HB 5006.

Currently I am the medical director at Clatsop Behavioral Health. Prior to taking that position I was in independent family practice here in Astoria for 8 years. Before that I practiced in Reedsport for 22 years. I trained at OHSU in the family medicine residency program with Dr. Elizabeth Steiner, who you know as our State Treasurer and past co-chair of the Ways and Means committee. Dr. Steiner and I are examples of the “grow your own/teach ‘em and keep ‘em” approach to building the primary care workforce which is the goal of SB443.

SB443 requests 1.5 million dollars in funding for ORCA (the Oregon Residency Collaborative Alliance), a network that links the 9 family medicine physician residency training programs around the state. This collaboration strengthens and enhances the educational quality of all the programs to recruit, teach, and keep excellent physicians for Oregon. It produces an increased number of highly trained primary care providers, which improves access to quality healthcare. It improves access to behavioral healthcare as well, since it is family physicians who do the majority of behavioral health and addiction medicine care.

More primary care is essential for a robust economy, reducing long term costs of chronic illness, and importantly, helping drive regional and local economic engines. In Clatsop County for example, healthcare and social services are the largest single segment of the economy. For Astoria, where health care employs about 10% of the workforce, Columbia Memorial Hospital is one of the largest employers.

SB443 is an investment in key state budget priorities, health care, behavioral health, and education, that will give large returns essential for a healthy state with a healthy economy.

We urge the committee to prioritize primary care through SB443 in this session.

Additional information on ORCA and our request of 1.5 million dollars is on the record for this meeting.

Thank you to the Ways and Means committee for your consideration, and for taking your time to go on the road to hear from us around the state, and especially in rural counties like Clatsop.