

**Testimony by Paul Weinhold
House Higher Education Committee
February 2, 2012**

Co-Chair Johnson, Co-chair Dembrow and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity again to provide brief testimony on behalf of the University of Oregon. For the record, I am Paul Weinhold, President and CEO of the University of Oregon Foundation.

Thank you for your work on this issue, your efforts with this legislation and your ongoing attention to improving higher education in Oregon.

Two weeks ago I addressed you about the importance of using this first annual session to continue the work begun last year with the passage of Senate Bills 242 and 909. This was good work that we all agree was a beginning, not an end, to overdue higher education reforms in our state.

You are well aware that the UO, and its community of alumni, strongly support the creation of publicly appointed institutional boards for universities that desire them. Our rationale is simple: If Oregon wants to achieve ambitious outcomes in higher education; Oregon needs an equally ambitious effort to modernize governance in higher education.

The current system is outdated and needs modernizing. It was established in the 1930's when a college education was a luxury and the state provided nearly all the funding for each school. Today, a college education is no longer a luxury – it's essential. The UO has nearly 23,000 students from all walks of life, an annual economic impact of \$ 2.2 billion and, as you know, the state provides less than 7% of our funding. State institutions, like the UO, are now expected to innovate and generate new sources of revenue, public and private, to remain accessible and competitive.

While nearly everything has changed in higher education over the past 80 years, our 1930's system of leadership, governance, and decision-making remains the same. SB 242 and 909 were recognition of the need for change; creating publicly appointed, publicly accountable university-specific boards is the next essential step in transforming and strengthening higher education in Oregon.

I urge you to take the strongest possible action this session to establish an irreversible path to modern university governance; a path with a time-certain destination for the establishment of local governing boards for universities that want them. Governing boards that have real responsibilities, and that remain accountable to a single, statewide education authority, as is envisioned in the Oregon Education Investment Board, and, as important, accountable to the legislature and citizens of our state.

What we seek is an independent board, not independence from Oregon's family of universities, community colleges and local school districts. Far from it, consistent with the vision of the OEIB,

the goal of greater autonomy must be to ensure that the UO, or any other institution with its own board, is an even stronger participant and partner in helping Oregon achieve our shared education and economic ambitions – from pre-kindergarten through college.

We recognize that with greater autonomy also comes greater responsibility. We welcome it.

The responsibility to: improve access and affordability for students, particularly Oregon students; achieve the goals contained in the state's 40-40-20 education plan; better manage scarce public resources and better leverage essential private resources; attract and retain the best faculty and administrators in the world; hire and, if necessary, fire a university president; and the responsibility to conduct our affairs in the light of day and with respect for public and legislative input.

We are prepared and eager to accept all of these responsibilities and more. And we are confident they will lead to not only better university governance, but a better university and better university system.

We would like to see the legislature approve authorization for institutional boards this year, this session. There are many in the UO community – dedicated, passionate advocates for an institution they love and want to see achieve great things – who wonder why boards couldn't have been approved last year. But we recognize, based on our conversations with many of you and others in the legislature that this goal is out of reach for this year.

With this in mind, we've committed ourselves over the past few weeks to working with you, the legislative leadership and the Governor to create a clear and certain path for approval of university-specific boards next year. While a great deal of progress has been made, we believe that the legislation as introduced before this committee falls short and we encourage you to adopt the amendments put forth by Representative Val Hoyle to ensure greater certainty for the implementation of university-specific governing boards next year.

We are eager to work with you and other partners to improve this legislation. While as introduced is better than the status quo, we cannot endorse legislation without certainty for board adoption.

That said, if as introduced, this is the best outcome you can achieve, of course, we will continue to work collaboratively with this committee, the Governor and others to make progress on this issue which is so critical to so many.

I want to leave you with a final thought about the urgency of creating a strong and, hopefully, stronger path to certain university-specific governance at the UO.

Right now, a process is underway to recruit a world class President for the University of Oregon; someone with experience and vision. We believe strongly, as does the interim UO President,

Bob Berdahl, that uncertainty in governance will create uncertainty in our candidate search and make the task of recruiting the best possible leader very difficult.

On the other hand, greater certainty in governance will open new doors of opportunity in recruiting a new and dynamic university president. A president ready and eager to accept both the responsibility and accountability that comes with greater freedom and autonomy.

Members of the committee, again, thank you for your leadership and attention to higher education. We look forward to working with you in the days and months ahead.

Thank you.