

Testimony before the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee – on Senate Bill 270 –
2/7/13 - Marc Nisenfeld, SEIU Local 503 Contact: Marc.Nisenfeld@gmail.com

Good afternoon – my name is Marc Nisenfeld and I am a member of the Service Employees International Union - Local 503. SEIU represents about 4,000 classified workers who support students and faculty at all seven universities. We work in food service; grounds maintenance, facilities maintenance and custodial services; office, IT and admin support and we staff campus libraries, to name just a few of our responsibilities. I serve on the SEIU Board of Directors as well as chair our Higher Education Council. I also chair our Bargaining Team, and I am President of our Local at Portland State University. For my day job, I work as a Development Engineer where I design and build custom apparatus for research scientists and graduate students at PSU. I've been at PSU for twenty years and I love having the opportunity to contribute to the higher education of Oregonians and to research that advances our knowledge in many areas.

I am here today to provide testimony of our concerns around Senate Bill 270 – the so called pathway for Institutional Boards at the University of Oregon and Portland State University. We are presently opposed to SB 270 as we await someone to provide a compelling argument for any benefits that will be created by this bill.

If these institutional boards are, in fact, created, we are strong supporters of having internal campus representatives serve as voting members on each of them. Over the last several years, our Union's Higher Education Council drafted a set of principles which were adopted by our entire Union. These principles included the following approach to institutional boards: "a majority of the members of such boards should be elected from the community and represent students, faculty and classified staff." What we envision is a body that has democratic roots and accountability and that relies on the experiences and knowledge that internal representatives – those who work and study on campus – can bring to these boards. Would you create an advisory/governance body for the legislature that didn't include the folks who worked within? Highly unlikely! We also strongly suggest that students, faculty and classified staff be able to elect their representatives. Furthermore, we would suggest holding jurisdictional elections for some of the designated at-large positions, similar to the way community colleges elect their board members. We see this as a way to further ensure a level of democracy and accountability that only predictable and contested elections can provide.

Some other concerns we have about the pathway that is SB 270 are:

- Local/institutional boards will cost the state more money & divide Oregon's Higher Education communities. Instead of a unified OUS request to the legislature - individual universities will use regional political clout to squeeze money out of the system in competition with the other universities.
- We understand that Institutional Local Boards will cost somewhere between \$3 million - \$8 million for each board - per year - as estimated by the State Board of Higher Education's Governance and Policy Committee in a March 16, 2012 presentation. Added functions per campus include Legal; Audits, Board Support and Communication; Risk Management; Treasury and Payroll, to name a few. SB 270 is insufficient at describing how "shared services" currently under OUS will be divided up and/or provided.
- New local boards will bloat administration on the backs of students. In preparation for having a local board, in the last 16 years UO has increased administrative costs 166% and PSU has increased them 144% in comparison to OSU - where their increase was only 85%.
- Present language in this bill - around the charge of local boards - grants their universities the power to increase student in-state tuition costs up to 5% per year without having to attain legislative approval. There is currently no language that controls graduate student tuition increases or increases for out-of-state student tuition. We believe in statewide oversight of tuition, as a way of continuing to keep system schools more affordable and truly public.

I do want to thank the authors and acknowledge your determination that -and I quote - Section 7; Number 2; letter c - "Institutional boards shall participate in a collective bargaining partnership with the Statewide Board of Higher Education and members of other institutional boards for the purpose of entering into collective bargaining agreements with statewide bargaining organizations of the employees of the university." It is essential that we remain a statewide unit for bargaining wages, benefits and working conditions. It is troubling to me that the word "public" was always prominent in this clause of earlier bill drafts until the most recent legislative iteration - as in "the employees of the public university." That phrase - *public university* - is what we are concerned about and why we are presently testifying in opposition to SB 270. We don't think these boards can be afforded with all that is going on in the economy; with educational overhauls in the state; and with the insecurity of our resources.

Finally, we want to make sure that any legislation around governance keeps all campus property in the ownership of the citizens of the state of Oregon. They should be maintained and treated as just that - public treasures - in state ownership. Thank you for your time and consideration.

(end of oral testimony)

I would be remiss not to add that a college education is becoming unrealistic for all Oregonians including our members' kids and grand-kids. Half of SEIU's 55,000 members are care providers for the elderly, for kids, and for people with disabilities – and the vast majority of them earn no more than \$10.20 an hour. That's less than \$22,000 per year and these people are supporting their families. College is not part of their culture and with costs escalating, it certainly is not part of their future either. Tuition is not affordable. And without that degree, the likelihood that their children continue in poverty as adults is high. This is true not just for care providers but for our state and Higher Ed workers as well since their average wage is well below \$40,000 also. Rising tuition and student debt is a big problem for our members too. It is also part of the overall issue of economic justice in America.

One goes from student debt to being underwater on their mortgage, and then to medical debt, and then, if one is lucky, they can avoid a bankruptcy or two on the way to retiring in poverty without a pension. We are fighting on all of these fronts to reverse the race to become a debtor nation. High tuition and student debt are real parts of the problem. Therefore, we are vigilant about maintaining the *public* aspect to our university and community college systems and from that place our principles that we have adopted spell out how we see some of these governance issues.

I will close by adding that our membership will be closely monitoring the drafts and discussions around the issues of "local governance" and institutional boards. We already have multiple new layers of oversight and governance that were created in 2011 by Senate Bill 242. Many of us are scratching our heads trying to determine what problems will be solved by another level of governance and how another level of infrastructure will be supported. Thank you for your time.