

To: Education Subcommittee of Ways and Means – SB 270A – May 29th 2013

Good morning my name is Kurt Willcox and I too am a member of SEIU 503. I work as a Research Analyst at the University of Oregon in the College of Education. I am a member of our union's bargaining team and an officer with UO Local 085. I am here to testify about SB 270-A.

Our union believes strongly that university institutional boards, if they are going to be allowed, should include internal campus representatives among their members. Our policy statement says we believe that "a majority of the members of such boards should be elected from the community and represent students, faculty and classified staff."

Why do we take this approach? Partly to ensure that the voices of those being governed by these boards are heard. But mostly because we believe that the experience and knowledge of people who work and study on campus will help institutional boards make more informed decisions.

Representative Peter Buckley put it this way in testimony to this committee last week, "My personal feeling is that we should not be afraid about being inclusive. I don't think the regionals, I don't think faculty, I don't think staff, and I don't think students yet feel they've been included in this process. I would encourage us to listen to their voices and be open to the idea that they are a part of the future of their institutions."

We in SEIU understand there is a concern that members of the campus community will put their needs ahead of the best interests of the university. We don't believe that will be the case. The fact is that everyone who serves on a board - whether it's a business leader, alumnus, or philanthropist, brings an array of self-interests to the table. But that doesn't mean they can't see and act on the larger needs of the organization. I know this

first-hand from the nearly 8 years I served on the old Oregon State Scholarship Commission. My initial appointment occurred shortly after I had helped the employees there form a union, but the agency strongly supported my reappointment three years later and my subsequent election as chair.

[As far as formal conflicts of interest are concerned, the standards for public servants in Oregon – both elected and appointed - are very clear. Internal constituents would need to recuse themselves whenever an institutional board was discussing an issue directly related to their own financial self-interests.]

Our union also strongly suggests that students, faculty and classified staff be able to nominate their own representatives for appointment by the governor.

[When it was first proposed, there was opposition to internal representation on the State Board of Higher Education, too. Over time, though, we've seen that arrangement operate successfully – and we're confident it will work on institutional boards, as well.]

A second concern we have is the potential increase in competition for state resources that may occur if several universities are allowed to create institutional boards. Competition certainly was the reality in the past when Oregon universities individually brought their budget requests to the legislature. It's a large part of why the State Board of Higher Education and the Oregon University System were created. As former Representative Tony VanVliet recently stated in a letter to the Corvallis Gazette-Times, SB 270 and HB 3120 “throw the entire university system back to 1929, when overzealous boards of regents fought over scarce funds and legislators rushed to form a system.” “I ponder why no one in the Legislature hollers, ‘Enough!’” If SB 270-A passes, there is

good reason to believe, based on this history, that Oregonians who attend the smaller, regional universities will end up losing.

[Mark Weiss, then Interim President of Western Oregon University, testified about this in May 2012 to the Special Committee on University Governance. He posed the issue this way: “I ask - are we better separating and becoming seven competitors? This might be good in the corporate world – pitting one against the other in the competition to survive, to maximize profits and even promote innovation – however it also creates winners and losers. Oregon and Oregonians cannot afford losing institutions of higher education in supporting the 40-40-20 goal and competing universities does a disservice to its citizenry.”]

Lastly, in its current form, SB 270-A would allow institutional boards to increase resident, undergraduate tuition by up to 5% a year without legislative approval. There is also no language in the bill that would limit these boards’ ability to raise graduate tuition rates or non-resident, undergraduate tuition rates. We in SEIU believe in statewide oversight of tuition, as a way of continuing to keep system schools more affordable and truly public.

Thank you for your time this morning. Marc and I would welcome any questions.