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Testimony
Senate Committee on Education

Senate Bill 439

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Chair Roblan and members of the Committee, I am Scott Reed, Vice Provost for University Outreach and Engagement and Director of the OSU Extension Service at Oregon State University.

The Oregon State University Extension Service has a long history of statewide programs that address issues and opportunities, including positive youth development. Our 4-H program enrolls more than 100,000 K-12 youth and represents what we believe is the largest statewide youth development program with educators and programs in every county. Our work is aimed at optimizing trajectories for positive growth and lifelong learning. Extension is the organizational home for the innovative and growing Oregon Environmental Literacy Program. Our expertise in the design of overnight, residential camping experiences provides an ideal foundation from which to build Outdoor School.

The priorities described in Senate Bill 439 are consistent with what we believe are critical learning goals that prepare youth to understand natural resources and the many contributions that our great outdoors makes to our collective welfare. Consistent with the bill, we strive to increase access to such learning by children who are underserved by limitations in resources, location or culture.

If implemented, funds provided by this bill will enable OSU Extension Service to develop additional capacity-building upon existing talents by acquiring short-term staff to develop curriculum and provide training, and long-term faculty and staff devoted to program delivery, quality monitoring, contracting, procurement and compliance. Doing so will ensure that every 6th grader in Oregon has a world class, experiential learning opportunity aimed at helping them gain a deeper understanding of their relationship with the natural world.

Associating Outdoor School with OSU Extension would enable us to bring to the program our expertise in science education, non-formal learning, youth development, program design, evaluation, and assessment. Our storied history over the last 100 plus years has given the Extension Service experience in taking educational innovations to scale while ensuring quality.

We believe that modeling exemplary practices is central to the role proposed for OSU. Our mission and successes with youth are focused on developing evidence-based curricula. We believe we can be instrumental in informing the design of effective venues for outdoor learning and will establish a community of practice focused on the operation of outdoor learning laboratories. Finally, we are committed to continuous quality improvement resulting from ongoing assessment and monitoring of program quality and effectiveness.

As you may know, the Extension Service, along with the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Forest Research Laboratory comprise the statewide public service programs at OSU – commonly known as “the OSU Statewides.” A key concern for the current legislative session is to recover the gradual loss of funding that has occurred over the last decade. Last year the OSU Board of Trustees endorsed a \$16 million funding proposal, which includes \$5 million targeted for the Extension Service. These funds are critical in ensuring our ongoing capacity to meet the needs of Oregonians across the state. As I address the benefits that would be provided by SB 439, I would be remiss not to mention this critical priority which if not met, will detract from our core mission.