

BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, THE HONORABLE SENATOR ROBLAN PRESIDING

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2015

IN THE MATTER OF SENATE BILL 113

TESTIMONY OF:

FRANCES KELLY, VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS,
KLAMATH COMMUNITY COLLEGE, IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 113

Rarely do I speak for all of the Oregon community colleges, but in this case, it's fair to state for the 17 of us that we are all unique, because it is an undeniable fact.

This fact is the source of my opposition to SB 113.

Each community college is governed by an independent, elected Board. Each Board reflects the sensibilities and the concerns of the community it serves. In Klamath County - a depressed community that is plagued by generational poverty - we are preaching the gospel of the post-secondary education; that without it, you're going to be poor and it's the only way to break the cycle.

The fact of each community college's individuality means that they are not susceptible of standardization.

Senate Bill 113 proposes that HECC define 11 employment categories and it clearly presumes that the 17 community colleges will be able to fit into those 11 "round hole" definitions. But not only would this amount to trying to fit 17 "square pegs" into those 11 "round holes," it's worse than that. It would be trying to fit the square peg that is Umpqua, the rectangular peg that is Southwestern Oregon, the triangular peg that is Central Oregon, the trapezoid peg that is Klamath, the rhombus peg that is Portland, the hexagonal peg that is Linn Benton - into these round holes. And it's already been proven that this won't work.

Then Section 3 of this Senate Bill supposed that with these standard definitions in place, it will be feasible to report ratios of these employment categories in terms of workload, student population, average contracted wages, and similar calculations.

Defining these terms and supplying standardized data in these formats has been attempted before in 2014 under House Bill 2152 and 2557. A work group was convened to try to define these terms. After arduous hours of work on the part of some very competent experts in their fields, the conclusion was inevitable that standardization had not been achieved and that the community colleges are not capable of being standardized in these ways. Data were produced, but it was so footnoted as to negate the concept that normative terms had been expressed in those data sets.

The work group found significant disparity in terms of quantifying workload (for example, release time; prep time; overload; academic advising; student club advising); and in terms of

equating an apples-to-apples formula for compensation (some colleges pick up the employee's 6% PERS contribution, others do not; health insurance benefits varied widely among the 17 community colleges in ways that are impossible to norm). For these and similar reasons, the work group concluded that IPEDS data are as good as it's practicable to get.

With all due respect, there is no evidence to suggest, no reason to believe, that the HECC will succeed in norming community colleges where the 2013 work group failed.

Compounding this problem is the fluctuating nature of the student population, a feature that is prevalent among many (but not all) of the community colleges. Speaking for Klamath Community College, and probably many of the others, at whatever point in time a student census is taken, it is nothing more than a data snapshot of a momentary, arbitrary point in time. Monitoring our student body is like watching a Trailblazers game – they're in, they're out, they're back in, they're out again . . . there is nowhere near the stability that is more typical of four-year colleges and universities.

Another impracticality of SB 113: Under Section 3(2), data must be submitted for the current academic year. Section 7 requires data submission for that current academic year by October 1. The academic year runs Summer through the following Spring, which means that on October 1 of a given academic year, at best, the colleges will have data for summer term only. Fall term will be about three days old and not even final. So it makes no sense.

In all of life's pursuits, there is a tradeoff involved, and in the case of SB 113, the tradeoff is not worth it. At my community college, we are so lean that we have 62 job descriptions and 70 employees filling them. Our knees are already buckling under the weight of obligations to comply with state and federal mandates. Examples include Title IX, Title IV, default rate, Clery Act compliance, Violence Against Women Act compliance, FMLA, OFLA, Veterans Preference, Affordable Care Act, public meetings, public records . . . the list is endless. And here we are with no bench strength, no second string, no utility infielders.

Many of these mandates are well worth it because they serve an articulable and significant purpose - often, to protect our students and our employees from various forms of harm and injustice. These mandates are worth the tradeoff in terms of expense and staff time to fulfill these obligations.

And while I have great respect for Senator Dembrow and I truly believe that his intentions are good, I believe just as firmly that Senate Bill 113 is a bad tradeoff. . It does nothing to help us with mission fulfillment and it's outside the scope of HECC's stated mission as well. It is unworkable, impractical, and has limited utility. When you weigh staff time and burden against what Senate Bill 113 is likely to yield - data and ratios so heavily footnoted they are essentially meaningless - it is absolutely not worth it.

Thank you.