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RE: Vote No on SB 322

March 16, 2015

Written testimony to the Senate Committee on Education:

I am unable to attend the March 19th Senate Committee on Education Public Hearing, so I am submitting this written testimony. As an industry professional, an active participant in local workforce initiatives via the Chamber of Commerce, a mother and one of your constituents, I request that you oppose SB 322 from an urban / non-urban divide and workforce / industry perspective.

As a business professional I appreciate the need for fiscal responsibility, however I cannot support a bill that curtails funding for critical fifth year programs actively being used to feed the local workforce without a viable solution in place that addresses the funding problem in the long term; SB 322 is not the solution we need. Declaring a "fiscal state of emergency" via SB 322 does not address the "economic state of emergency" that Albany and many other non-urban Oregon communities are in, due in part, to steep cuts in skilled trade programs in grades 6-12 over the last 25 years. SB 322 does not take into account the risks that eliminating a fifth year program will have on the future workforce and economic development in the state of Oregon if enacted. It is in this vein that I ask the Senate Committee on Education to oppose SB 322 and begin the important work of drafting a bill that will facilitate the skilled training of our youth by providing a long-term solution that funds fifth year programs; programs that bridge the gap between High School and the necessary training to become a gainfully employed, tax paying citizen of Oregon.

URBAN/NON-URBAN DIVIDE

In addressing the true impact of a fifth year program and the value it provides, we must address the urban / non-urban divide. Data shows inequitable outcomes between urban and non-urban school districts. Fifth-year programs create equality and provide a pathway for success for kids who may otherwise fall through the cracks simply because they are "unaware" of opportunities available to them.

- Consider the 58% fall-to-fall college retention rates for non-urban student without fifth year program versus the urban rate of 68%. With fifth year programs, fall-to-fall retention rates for non-urban students are 71%.
- Fifth year programs increase high school completion rates in non-rural areas. Dallas HS retention rate is 80% over the past 10 years. South Albany HS counselors report that every year, they work with students who stay engaged with high school, because the fifth year provides them options after high school.
- The program makes economic sense. Students who complete some level of college or skilled trade training do better financially, don't need state-funded resources for safety net programs, and pay higher taxes. ***This program provides a return on investment.***
- Statistics show that disadvantaged students doubt they can do college or any post-high school course work. They apply for financial aid at exponentially lower rates than their peers. This program allows students to get a year of credit, and with support, build confidence that leads to higher rates of persistence. They also learn how to access college support services and financial



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aid, which supports their completion. Consider first generation and homeless students, or students that are young parents and can use this opportunity to engage in a certificate program, so they can support themselves and their current or future families.

WORKFORCE/INDUSTRY

It is estimated that in Albany, home to a growing metals and manufacturing economy, more than 1000 jobs will be added in the next 5-7 years. Because the workforce shortage problem is so severe in Linn and Benton counties, industry, K-12, the Community College (LBCC), the Chamber of Commerce and local government have all teamed up to develop a solution that will not only provide a skilled workforce, but will also help build a strong local economy and bolster economic development in our area. The solution is comprised of resources and funds being contributed by ALL parties to educate parents, students, educational professionals and the business community about the programs, training and jobs available in the area today; and to aide young adults and individuals in career transitions in navigating the resources available to them. The fifth year option facilitated by K-12 and LBCC is a critical component of this program and gives students a pipeline and the necessary resources to realize a living-wage career in manufacturing.

From an industry perspective; I cannot emphasize enough the magnitude of the current workforce problem. The Aerospace industry is undergoing unprecedented growth and will continue to do so over the next several years; this will create a large demand for metal products manufactured in this community and the Portland metro-area. Currently, there is not an adequate labor force in the State of Oregon to meet the current and future job needs of the businesses that support the metals industry; this is a fact that cannot be disputed and the employment department has the data to prove that the gaps exist. We need highly skilled welders, machinists and NDT specialists; we need individuals that are educated in various aspects of technical manufacturing as it pertains to today's manufacturing equipment. Community Colleges provide this training and access to a fifth year program jumpstarts that training and greatly improves a community's ability to begin to close the workforce gap.

This letter doesn't even begin to address other industries in Oregon that are also negatively impacted by the workforce shortage including food handling / processing, agriculture, construction work that requires skilled electricians and plumbers; the list goes on. Again, I urge you, vote NO on SB 322 and begin developing a solution to the problem that will adequately continue to fund a fifth year program.

Respectfully,

Stephanie O'Connor

Cc: Sen. Baertschiger Jr., Sen. Beyer, Sen. Gelsler, Sen. Hass, Sen. Knopp, Sen. Kruse, Sen. Roblan, Gretchen Engbring, Oksana Glukhovskikh, Maria Delapoer, Janet Steele, Greg Hamman, Jim Denham