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February 23, 2017

House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce
Representative Jeff Reardon, Chair
900 Court Street NE, Room 431
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for HB 2782 – Full Funding of OSU-Cascades Expansion

Chair Reardon and Members of the Committee:

I'd like to explain to you why I believe fully funding the expansion of OSU-Cascades is so crucial for Central Oregon, in part by explaining why it is that I am a 43-year-old college student. I grew up in the small Central Oregon town of Madras, and attended Central Oregon Community College as a young person. It took a while to obtain my Associate of Arts degree, as I was also working in my family business (Madras Sanitary Service) and commuting two hours round-trip to the campus in Bend. I worked hard, did well, and graduated about 20 years ago. Even though I would have loved to have continued on, at least to obtain my Bachelor's degree, that was the end of the educational road for me, because there were no other college options in my region. I was needed in my family business, and any education I was going to get would have to be within commuting distance.

I was place-bound by my business, just as thousands of other potential students are place-bound for all kinds of reasons. Studies show that a large percentage of young people won't attend college at all if there isn't one within 50 miles of home. That clearly seems to have been the case in Jefferson County, where only 16% of our adult population has a Bachelor's degree or higher. Distance was a deal-breaker for me, as it was for many of my peers.

I was so excited to see OSU-Cascades become a reality in Central Oregon. Even though I was by then decades into my career, and had served several years on my City Council and then as Mayor, I never lost the sense of regret about not having gotten the level of education I really wanted and needed. So, in 2014 I went back to school, and even though it's still a bit awkward for me, since many of my classmates weren't even born when I graduated from high school, I am grateful every day to finally have this opportunity.

OSU-Cascades is now serving the higher education needs of what was for so long the most underserved area of Oregon. Because of all the pent-up demand, the school is growing quickly. If we don't act now to add additional capacity, we will very soon run out of space. My generation of Central Oregonians missed out on opportunities because there was no university nearby; this generation may miss opportunities because of a lack of investment. We as a community are committed to do our part in this push for funding; please invest in OSU-Cascades and help us catch up with the rest of Oregon.

Sincerely,

Melanie Widmer
President
Madras Sanitary Service