



Date: March 9, 2017

To: House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee
Chair Reardon and members

From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations

RE: *HB 2439 [K-12 funding for higher education costs]*

On behalf of OEA's 44,000 teachers, community college faculty, and other education employees, I am testifying in opposition to HB 2439, which would set up a complicated funding approach for students wishing to enroll in higher education classes.

Though we appreciate innovation in thinking about how best to assist Oregon students in realizing their educational ambitions and goals, we believe that this bill would be fiscally unwise and duplicative of other, more successful approaches.

More than a decade ago, education stakeholders worked to develop a balanced approach that served a similar goal – the Expanded Options program. That program, found in ORS 340, now serves 238 students per year. An important distinction between this program and the one proposed is that care was taken to ensure that district fiscal realities, student readiness, and priority for students at risk were values baked into the law. In addition to Expanded Options, there are 121 students in the Post-Graduate Scholars Program, another 1,698 taking other college classes through arrangements with their high schools, and 35,115 students enrolled in various dual enrollment programs [8,122 at community colleges and universities]. These programs enable students to take part- or full-time college courses.*

By contrast, HB 2439 would open the door to unbridled use of funds meant for K-12 school operations for any student. Based on a perspective that State School Fund resources should “follow the child”, this bill fails to consider the stranded costs all districts must pay for out of these resources – costs that remain whether the student opts to study elsewhere or not. In fact, this bill goes one step further: it calculates the per-student funding for any student residing in the school district's boundaries, directs the school district to send the to the community college the SSF funding to cover college costs for a student who wishes to attend community college for free, and then directs the district to refund half the balance remaining from that sum back to the State School Fund. The result is that already-limited resources would be further strained, which could lead to program cuts in the district – an unintended but likely impact to enrolled students. School choice shouldn't mean that state policy “chooses” the few at the expense of the many.

We expect school districts to manage finances responsibly. We honor the value of local control. We believe that student-centered educational strategies are best. And finally, we believe that the state has a role in ensuring that the fiscal management of education resources is best accomplished when policymakers consider the impacts of such ideas on all students – not just those who seek to opt out of their resident school. We do not believe that these values are represented in the bill before you, and for that reason, we respectfully ask that it not pass out of this committee.

Thank you for considering these thoughts.

***Data provided by the ODE and HECC and are based on 2015-16 enrollments.**