

May 17, 2017

Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is William Thomas and I am a Research Associate in the Botany and Plant Pathology Department in the College of Agriculture at Oregon State University. Since 2012, I have worked under the direction of other researchers with the OSU Plant Clinic and with OSU Extension Service, using my expertise in molecular and cellular biology to develop and implement molecular methods for the detection of plant pathogens in both agricultural and greenhouse settings. Many of the plant diseases we are concerned with have significant agricultural and economic implications for growers in Oregon and throughout the Pacific Northwest. Our ability to quickly respond to emerging diseases that threaten growers in our region depends upon a close collaboration between researchers with a variety of specializations.

I am writing in support of HB 3170 because I believe that it recognizes the collaborative nature of the work we do at OSU. As I mentioned above, my role as a Research Associate affords me the opportunity to collaborate with other investigators in the pursuit of our research goals. Because of the nature of academic research funding, I am frequently employed through multiple grants, each of which may be administered by a different principal investigator. Under the current definition of a supervisor under PECBA, I have had as many as three supervisors at one time, which puts each of their collective bargaining rights into question because of their choice to collaborate with me.

Principal investigators, though they may have some supervisory authority, are primarily researchers who from time to time work with faculty research assistants or research associates to achieve the objectives of a funded project. Because they are researchers, not administrators, principal investigators may have goals that differ from the priorities of the administration. Principal investigators in the College of Agriculture brought in over \$52 million in grant money in fiscal 2016, much of which is claimed by the university as overhead; however, the researchers responsible for securing this funding have little influence over how this overhead is allocated. With the proposed budget cuts to many of the agencies we rely on for external funding, it is critical that those responsible for administering grants in the pursuit of research have a voice in the priorities of the university. HB 3170 would give principal investigators the choice to participate in a faculty union, granting them the same protections as their collaborators who are not currently supervising research associates or faculty research assistants.

The Willamette Valley is the grass seed capital of the world; in addition, we are a hub of vegetable seed production. Half the brassica vegetable seed (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, etc.) used in the US is produced here, and we account for one quarter of the world's supply of this seed. I have seen firsthand that the work we do at OSU has real-world implications for the global food supply. The principal investigators on the front lines of global food security should not have to choose between collaboration or their right to collective bargaining. I respectfully encourage the Committee to support HB 3170, so that these researchers may enjoy the same rights as their colleagues to pursue excellence in their service to Oregon and the global community under the full protection of the law.

Sincerely,

William J. Thomas, PhD

Submitted as an individual not as a representative of the Oregon State University.