



SOUTHWESTERN

AN OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

79th Oregon State Legislature – 2017
Senate Rules Committee
Wednesday, May 31, 2017 • Oregon Capitol • Salem, Oregon
Oral and Written Testimony in Support of Passage of House Bill 2696A
Submitted by Dr. Patty Scott, Ed.D, President
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Sen. Burdick and members of the Committee, I am Dr. Patty Scott Ed.D., President of Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay, and I am testifying in support of passage of House Bill 2696A.

This proposed legislation will eliminate a significant barrier for community colleges in communicating with district residents most likely to vote, and those who want to be informed. HB 2696A will allow colleges to share factual information directly with voters about activities and projects colleges are pursuing in workforce development and poverty reduction in the communities and for the students the colleges serve.

Current law specifically allows county-wide and metropolitan service district information in the Oregon Voters' Pamphlet. Those districts provide a specific set of services for the benefit and well-being of their constituents, as do our community college service districts. However as the law currently stands, the majority of Oregon's community colleges cannot place information in the statewide voters' pamphlet.

Our college district is 3,690 square miles over two full counties and one partial county. None of these counties – Coos, Curry or Douglas – print their own voters' pamphlets, and none plan to do so in the future. Rural Oregon counties cannot afford voter pamphlets. Southwestern is not alone in facing this barrier.

Of Oregon's 17 community colleges, 13 provide services in more than one county and one serves an area smaller than a county. This means of 14 of 17 community colleges by law cannot place information related to bond measures in the state voter's pamphlet. The result is that, particularly in rural Oregon, colleges have no low-cost options to reach registered voters within their districts. Many of these voters are often isolated and harder to reach via any means.

This barrier impacts rural colleges hardest when trying to communicate with voters about bond measures and proposed facility investments. As you are aware, in order to build new or renovate outdated facilities, community colleges must raise half the funds for a state match. In low-income rural communities, fundraising the match is rarely a viable option, and our colleges have few options other than presenting bond requests to voters. We need to communicate with voters; all voters affordably and factually.

Without access to the voters' pamphlet, it's fair to assume that measures in rural districts will most often fail. As a result, the disparity gap in Oregon will continue to fuel rural communities' frustration around the rural/metro divide. HB 2696A is an opportunity to eliminate a barrier for rural community colleges in connecting with voters and sharing factual information.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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