



Testimony on Senate Bill 8
Senate Education Committee
February 7, 2017

Chair Roblan, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on SB 8.

One of the central missions of the Commission is to enhance the pathways that exist for students to move more simply and efficiently between the various sectors in our secondary and post-secondary education systems. In achieving progress toward this very important goal, the Commission employs multiple strategies and executes numerous statutory functions. These include:

- Consistently convening stakeholders and experts to investigate promising, innovative approaches to higher education;
- Working with stakeholders to implement the Transfer Student Bill of Rights (ORS 341.430);
- Working with local and national organizations to disseminate best practices around student support and academic alignment, and
- Funding universities on the basis of a formula that accounts, in-part, for student completions and student support, encouraging a focus on these activities.

These approaches are all part of a broader strategic plan that addresses the question that appears to form the basis of the legislation before you today, chiefly: How can we better provide high quality, affordable higher education to students?

If presented with a plan sponsored by a college and a university, as authorized by this legislation, and assuming institutions have addressed all technical, legal, financial and accreditation issues appropriately, the Commission would evaluate such a proposal primarily based on whether or not such a merger ultimately improved student pathways and increased the likelihood of success of students in completing their course of study. These plans would also need to demonstrate the effect of a merger on affordability and student support—key elements to the statewide strategic plan for higher education.

The Commission would stand ready to work with any pair of institutions that have made the determination that a merger is in the interests of Oregon students and the State, and that have put forward a comprehensive plan as required by this legislation.

I encourage you to contact me with any questions you have.