

**Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
of the Oregon House of Representatives
February 8, 2018**

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, for the record, our names are Aidan Whittemore and Karen Partida. We are currently juniors at West Linn High School in West Linn, Oregon, where we have the opportunity to take many AP and dual enrollment courses. We are writing to ask for your support for House Bill 4053, a bill relating to the transfer of college credits from Oregon high schools to public institutions of higher education in Oregon.

As a four-year degree has become closer to a necessity over the past few decades, the value of one has gone up; however, the cost has risen disproportionately. According to Business Insider, the cost of college has increased 260% since 1980, which is significantly more than the 120% increase in all consumer items over that same time period. Today, the average cost of in-state tuition is around \$9,000, which does not include room, board, books, or student fees. As the price of college is increasing, the number of people who can pay for it is decreasing. Many students, then, rely on alternative ways to fund their education as opposed to student loans, such as financial aid, military service, and, as House Bill 4053 relates to, accelerated high school courses.

There are many different paths through which students can do that, including taking AP courses (and passing the subsequent exam), taking IB courses, and participating in dual enrollment courses. AP exams range in price depending on the school district they are administered in; however, they typically cap out at around \$90. This is about \$300 less than it would cost to take the equivalent of that class at a community college, and about \$1000 less than it would be to take the equivalent of that class at a four-year university. IB courses typically cap out at around \$300, which also saves students some \$700, assuming they attend a four-year university. The cost of dual enrollment courses vary extremely. At our high school, they can cost as little as \$10 per credit, whereas those same credits could cost hundreds of dollars elsewhere. No matter which accelerated credit opportunity a student chooses to use, it will save them money in the long run.

The problem is, however, that after students complete these various accelerated learning opportunities, they often face obstacles in transferring the credits they have earned. These obstacles include four-year universities not accepting credits given to students through a community-college-sponsored dual enrollment program, AP and IB credits not transferring, credits being accepted only as electives, forcing students to retake the class to get credits toward their degree, and a lack of uniformity of credit transferability among Oregon institutes of public higher education. Right now, there are many discrepancies between different schools. It is unclear what credits will and will not transfer to what schools. House Bill 4053 is a step in the

right direction toward fixing these problems students face by first conducting research to address these discrepancies, then using the data obtained to create uniform guidelines for transferring credits.

The opportunity to earn college credit while in high school is one that many students, especially those in low-income families, utilize. I, Karen Partida, can speak with vigor when saying that the college credits attained throughout one's high school career are crucial in the case of families where paying a tuition is not possible. My parents are not going to be able to offer me financial aid for when I go off to university, so having to pay for fewer courses because of the work that I put in during high school is going to help lower my student debt significantly. I am passionate about my education and wish to further it, but tuition is going to play a major factor in where I enroll. This bases the quality of my education on whether the amount that I would have to pay for tuition is feasible, rather than the amount that I can add to the community. Qualifying for college credits now and knowing that they will be acknowledged by universities in the future is not only validation, but an immense form of financial help for a large demographic of students.

As the oldest of four children, I, Aidan Whittemore, have high aspirations that sometimes seem unattainable due to the cost of college. When I was in eighth grade I decided I would gain as many college credits while in high school as possible to save both time and money in the future, which I hoped would help me graduate college in four years with two degrees. I planned out my entire high school career before I even entered to maximize my success. I have completed three AP courses, I am currently enrolled in four, I have three dual enrollment opportunities I plan to utilize this year, and I have even bigger plans for next year. I have spent hundreds of dollars and countless hours I will never get back to achieve what I have. It would be devastating if, when I go to college, all - or even any - of that was in vain. Students deserve to be acknowledged for the work they have done. If they are given accelerated learning opportunities and take advantage of them, the credits students earn should be able to follow them to college.

For other students, having college credits they can count toward getting their degree is essential for their overall success and wellbeing. Erich Kramer is currently a senior at Oregon State University. He is the eldest child in his family and is on the path to graduate early because of the college credits he had going into his first year at OSU. However, Erich went in to university worried about the amount of time that he was going to have to spend in school before he could start his career. Although he did have some financial aid from his family, they were not willing to help him for the full four years. He was expected to find a job and be able to sustain himself, but with a degree in engineering as the goal, Erich knew he was not going to have enough time for both. He was counting on college credits obtained in high school to be able to make his educational endeavor possible. Thanks to the policies at OSU, Erich was able to start as a junior; many of his credits were validated to opt him out of math and science classes alike, saving him

thousands of dollars and priceless time. Policies like these for credit transfer are great, but they are often inconsistent or not even present at most universities in our state. By passing this bill, these holes in the system can be patched.

House Bill 4053 is designed to ensure the facilitation of credit transfer through research conducted by the Department of Education and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Both of the entities' findings would be presented in a report that would then be used to determine statewide standards on how credits could be transferred and the guidelines under which they would be accepted, developed by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Research would include an assessment of the number of students that participated in accelerated college credit programs and how many completed the program. More importantly, it would include the number of students who attempted to transfer credits they got in high school from one of these programs to any public post-secondary institution of higher education in the state, followed by the percentage whose credits were actually accepted.

To further put the data into perspective, the percentage of credits that were accepted toward the completion of a certificate or degree, as opposed to being accepted as an elective credit, out of the credits accepted in general, would be included. The percentage of students whose credits were not accepted would also be included, along with an estimate of the amount of state money that went to accelerated college credit programs that had unsatisfactory results. The standards for credit transferability would be altered every year depending on the results of the annual report, with institution websites being kept up to date with any changes in policy for public access by students. By having clear rules that apply equally at universities across the state, students will be able to know how their college credits will be accepted anywhere they choose to enroll. The possibility for confusion or backtracking regarding the credibility of their credits would be minimized greatly.

Institutions across the state would also benefit from this. Highly capable students that would have opted out of enrolling at a university because of the uncertainty surrounding their high school college credits will be able to contribute to the pristine environment of whatever university this might be. Students feel that their hard work was worth it, and a college's student body grows in strength all the while. Based on each year's findings on accelerated college credit programs, a clear set of requirements for students and colleges on credit transfer will be ensued. The interaction between potential enrollees and institutions will be much smoother. Those with financial worries will have an extra incentive for attending a college well-suited to their academic abilities, and these colleges will benefit from having a motivated and dedicated student body. By allowing research to be conducted in order to create appropriate statewide guidelines for credit transfer, the process to transfer credits is made the same throughout all of Oregon, making it less of a rigor and allowing for students to flourish.

We hope you will support us and all the students of Oregon in their pursuit of a faster, cheaper college experience and support House Bill 4053.