

January 20, 2019

Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Thomsen and members of the committee,

For the record my name is David McDonald. I serve as the Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives for Western Oregon University. My comments today regarding SB-4 are on behalf of all seven public universities.

We appreciate Senate President Courtney's continued and sincere interest in higher education. The fact that there is a concern that an Oregon community college or university may someday need to consider a merger should be alarming to every person in this room.

We thank Senator Courtney for shining a light on the reality that decades of disinvestment by the state has created the fiscal environment where Oregon's primary engine for social mobility and social justice is now imperiled. Despite mountains of research and scholarship that has repeatedly found that an increase in education leads to tremendous benefits for the state and its citizens, Oregon has continued to push the colleges and universities down towards the fiscal bottom.

Chief among the shared benefits of a college degree:

- Better health –lower health care costs and utilization of Medicare and Oregon Health Plan
- Higher employment—Reduced need for unemployment benefits and increased taxable income
- Higher levels of civic engagement, voluntarism, and voting—Increased quality of life for everyone
- Higher self-awareness and global perspective—Increased ability to effectively and respectfully work with people from different backgrounds
- Creation of new cycles of educational attainment. Parents with college degrees are more likely to read to their children daily and actively support their kids' educational efforts

This bill seeks to protect access to higher education for all Oregonians. We would prefer to have a process where there is an on-going expansion of access leading to more Oregonians from all corners of the state and all social and economic backgrounds earning their college degrees with reduced reliance on student loans. Oregon will benefit from meaningful and sustained investments that allow the universities to offer students a rich array of relevant high-quality academic programs and services at more affordable prices.

SB-4 attempts to treat the symptom of the much larger and malignant problem of sustained under-funding of higher education in Oregon. The option to merge schools is akin to having to resort to an organ transplant because of chronic malnutrition. While merging schools could be an option, the Oregon economy, and communities from the coast to the Snake River and from Mt. Hood to Mt. Ashland are best served by having strong and well-funded colleges and universities.

Oregon's public universities are fully committed to working with you and your colleagues to create an Oregon that meets the needs of our students and our communities today and tomorrow.