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Senate Committee on Judiciary
SB 576 Public Hearing
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As you consider SB 576, we would like to reiterate the commitment of Oregon's 17 community colleges to maintaining safe campus communities for our students, faculty and staff, as well as community members who utilize our facilities. This is a responsibility we take seriously. The reality is that the world has changed since the creation of community colleges in Oregon more than 50 years ago. Most of Oregon's community college campuses are open, multi-building campuses and we serve more than 380,000 students statewide. With a mix of urban, suburban and rural settings, each college has approached campus safety and security in ways that work best for their communities.

Community college public safety officers play an important role in ensuring the safety and security of students, faculty, and staff on campus properties. They do this in many ways including enforcing college policies and procedures, regulating traffic as permitted under ORS 341.300, partnering with local law enforcement on criminal matters that exceed the authority of college public safety officers, complying with the requirements of federal laws in particular Title IX and the Clery Act, and participating in college behavioral threat assessment teams to identify and respond to issues that may lead to unsafe situations. The manner in which they carry out these roles depends greatly on the communities they serve and the environments in which they operate within the limits of their legal authority. Community colleges are not authorized under Oregon law to create police departments and no Oregon community college board is seeking that authority. Most colleges have public safety departments but several of the smaller colleges operating in rural areas do not. A few colleges utilize outside private security contractors to provide security services full-time or when there are staffing shortages.

After the tragic shooting at Umpqua Community College (UCC), community colleges came together and assessed their needs for improving campus safety. This comprehensive review included reviewing safety features such as door locks and securing of buildings, the use of security cameras, and most importantly, the relationships colleges have with their local law enforcement agencies. Community college representatives also participated in the Governor's Campus Safety Work Group that was formed as a result of the UCC shooting. This work resulted in specific recommendations related to campus safety. We are continuing to participate in efforts to address the recommendations from the Work Group report on multiple levels including campus safety and resilience (response, continuity and recovery), behavioral threat assessment, physical security and infrastructure, and public safety and law enforcement.

We hope the committee will view community colleges as partners in these conversations as we all have the same goals related to ensuring the safety of our college campuses. We look forward to continuing this conversation and advancing the recommendations developed by the Governor's Campus Safety Work Group in 2016.