



Testimony on House Bill 2910
House Committee on Education
March 13, 2019

Chair Doherty, Vice-Chairs Alonso-Leon, Helt, and members of the Committee. 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 submit testimony on HB 2910.

Oregon statutes and administrative rules do not restrict Oregon Promise Grant eligibility for incarcerated students or students in OYA custody, providing they meet all other eligibility criteria. According to OYA, seven students have received the Oregon Promise Grant while in custody this year. However, the statutes currently restrict students that have received a diploma or GED® more than six months prior to beginning coursework from receiving a Promise grant. This means a student that enters a period of incarceration or custody loses eligibility if they receive their credential before or during their custody period if they are unable to enroll in college.

The Oregon Promise program has a waiver process to allow for delayed college enrollment, providing the student can document a significant hardship that prevents enrollment at a community college within the six-month timeframe. Current administrative practice is to approve waivers for situations such as student medical emergency, family member death or medical emergency, natural disaster, military or National Guard training or active duty. If HB 2910 passes, HECC would create an additional waiver that allows formerly incarcerated students to maintain their eligibility for six months after the end of an initial period of incarceration or custody.

The confirmation process will likely include receipt of release date data from DOC/OYA via data-sharing agreements, or self-reported official documentation about incarceration or custody dates from the student. Depending on their graduation date and date of release, students who are incarcerated or in OYA custody may have to apply for Oregon Promise before they complete their term or soon after their release.

HECC requests an amendment that delays the effect of the bill until January 1, 2020 in order to have a smooth rollout and allow for communication with community college financial aid offices. This will also allow HECC time to create new forms and processes, solidify data sharing needs with other offices and train staff.

Under the proposed co-chair's budget framework for the next biennium, HECC projects the need to institute an EFC cap on the Oregon Promise program in order to reduce program expenses to the amount funded by the co-chairs budget. Without an increase in funding, any bill that increases Oregon Promise eligibility is likely to result in a decrease in the EFC cap necessary to keep the program within available appropriations.

Thank you for your time today.