

March 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 are on behalf of all seven public universities.

There are too few opportunities for us to join together to make a meaningful investment in a group of hard-working students who have continually met our educational and societal benchmarks. These students are in so many ways our generation's success story waiting to be fully written. The students who would benefit from SB 958 are poised to become our next business owners, teachers, community leaders and professionals such as doctors, lawyers, or even university administrators.

SB 859 is not a hand-out. It is a hand-up and the provision of loans evens the playing field slightly for students who are simply seeking a way to pay for the increasing cost of a university education. This loan program helps to fill a major funding gap for Tuition Equity students. Federal policy excludes Tuition Equity students from federal grants or loans. State law allows support to Tuition Equity university students from the Oregon Opportunity Grant. There is no additional form of assistance available.

The design of the Dreamers Access Program was based upon a similar program that operates in California. The Oregon version was created in typical Oregon fashion, by a collaborative workgroup of legislators and legislative staff, HECC staff, students, and campus staff. The development process of this bill has resulted in a bill that serves students, and helps the state build a stronger future for all. On behalf of the universities I am pleased to express my gratitude to Representative Hernandez, Senator Dembrow, and Senator Wagner for their leadership.

I draw your attention to two unique and powerful aspects of this legislation.

- Inclusion of graduate students. SB 958 allows graduate students to be eligible to receive these loans. This is critical since there is no other form of state or federal aid available to support tuition equity students in graduate school.
- This is loan program, not a grant. Students will be repaying the state for the loans that they take out.

The seven public universities enthusiastically support SB 958. Thank you.