

April 11, 2019

To: Co-Chairs Rep. Smith Warner and Sen. Roblan, members of the Joint Committee on Student Success

From: Nathaniel Brown, Oregon Business & Industry

RE: OBI Testimony in Support of Additional Investments for Higher Education in the Student Success Act

Co-chairs and Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success:

On behalf of Oregon Business & Industry's (OBI) membership of more than 1,600 businesses that employ nearly 330,000 people in the state, thank you for your diligent and bipartisan efforts to improve education outcomes in Oregon. OBI members value Oregon's public education system and support efforts to establish stable funding for strategic, evidence-based investments that result in measurable outcomes in student achievement throughout the entire continuum.

The release of the initial framework of the Student Success Act is a welcome development in this broad and needed discussion about how we can better serve our students. OBI appreciates the high priority given to early learning programs, to programs that better meet the needs of our underserved communities throughout the system, as well as the full funding to Measure 98, among the other important programs and initiatives identified in the framework. We are also grateful the structuring of the District Improvement Account allows flexibility for each district's unique needs.

As the leading voice of Oregon's business community, OBI has long been a steadfast advocate for education investments that benefit students from cradle to career. While this proposed framework indicates significant investment in early childhood and K-12 education, we are disappointed to see a lack of meaningful investment in our community colleges and higher education institutions which are critical to transitioning Oregon's students into our workforce. The intent of this testimony is in no way to undervalue the initial investments identified for early learning and K-12, but merely to shine a light on this important missing piece.

Access to qualified talent is a consistent challenge facing OBI members as our economy adapts to advancing technologies. Community colleges and public universities across the state lead the way in partnering with businesses in their communities to train students for specific skills they'll need in local jobs, which often lead to effective hands-on learning opportunities and better economic outcomes for the students and community as a whole. Without a doubt, postsecondary education leads directly to higher-wage jobs and a better life.

Oregon simply cannot afford to miss this opportunity to invest in our higher education system in a substantial way. No education investment package is complete without providing community colleges and public universities with the support they need to reduce barriers to education, keep tuition increases to a minimum and expand effective programs like the Oregon Opportunity Grant and CTE Pathways in addition to what has been proposed in the base budget.

Beyond the dynamic needs of Oregon's workforce, postsecondary education is a pathway out of poverty, especially for those who come from historically underrepresented backgrounds or are

the first in their family to attend college. Any student in Oregon who wants to go to college should have access to that opportunity with the support required to succeed once they arrive on campus. Indeed, ensuring a clear path forward for high school students is one of the most effective ways of increasing our state's graduation rates.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these critical investments in our students, our workforce and our state. We look forward engaging in this work as the Student Success Act is further developed and OBI is available and eager to provide the employer perspective whenever needed.

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