



EASTERN OREGON
UNIVERSITY

May 20, 2019

House Committee on Revenue
900 Court Street NE HR A
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Nathanson and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Tom Insko and I am President of Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, Oregon. I am writing today in support of House Bill 2387 which establishes the Education Savings Credit.

Eastern Oregon University (EOU), Oregon's official "Rural University" is an access university. Our student population is approximately 70% Oregonians, with more than 42% first generation college students and we have the highest percentage of Pell-eligible students of any Oregon public university.

When we make decisions on our budget, or program offerings, we assess those decisions based on whether they advance our goals of reducing barriers and opening doors to students who otherwise would not be able to attend college. This bill is aligned with that goal and would help more low-income families across the state begin to save for their children's future in a way that the current system of deductions does not.

I met with State Treasurer Tobias Read earlier this year and was surprised to see the data that showed more than 88% of the families utilizing the current deduction program represented only nine counties of our thirty-six. Rural Oregon was underrepresented both in the east and the south. It also exposed how the current tool is really only benefiting higher income earners that itemize their taxes, leaving out lower-income households that do not.

There are a lot of factors that go into affordability for post-secondary education. We are trying to address those challenges at EOU and within the framework of Oregon's post-secondary education network. I look forward to leading some of those conversations and initiatives in partnership with the legislature in the coming years. I recognize that this idea alone will not solve the problem of affordability and debt reduction for Oregon students, but it is one idea that the legislature can take today that could be part of a comprehensive answer for the long-term.

I encourage you to take this bill into serious consideration. I know final budget decisions are before you with competing demands, and the universities are among those demands. I believe that with adequate funding to stabilize the universities and this new credit for low-income Oregonians, the legislature can begin to lay the foundation for future progress to truly break barriers to access so any Oregon student who wants to attend college or a university can do so.

Thank you for your consideration.

Thomas A. Insko
President