



Testimony on House Bill 4056

House Education Committee

February 5, 2020

Chair Doherty, Vice-Chairs Alonso Leon and 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 (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 4056.

The HECC serves as the state board with responsibility for recommending to the legislature changes to community college service district boundaries. For over 18 months, HECC has been working with Central Oregon Community College (COCC), Klamath Community College (KCC), Lake County Officials, and concerned residents of N. Lake County on the question of the status of N. Lake County and whether it should remain affiliated with COCC, move to KCC, or be a part of no community college district. This investigation and collaboration began with a petition to the Commission from residents of N. Lake County who were dissatisfied with the level of services provided by COCC. Whereas HECC can issue orders for changes, these orders must be approved by you.

After multiple public hearings and extended consultation with all parties, the Commission determined that residents of N. Lake County would be better served by Klamath Community College. The bill, through its whereas statements, make the case as to why these residents, numbering fewer than 2,000 and graduating approximately 10 high school students per year, are better served by changing affiliation. If passed, it will take effect on June 30 of this year.

Since the establishment of the COCC Service District, conditions in this part of the state have changed. Where there once was no school building, the North Lake School District now stands, and based on its location, only those students in the northern part of the school district are eligible for in-district services from COCC. North Lake School District is not part of the Intermountain ESD, as most other schools in COCC's service district are. KCC itself was not founded until 1996, but has been serving Lake County for several years, including providing distance-learning opportunities to students in the N. Lake School District.

At the public hearings, residents expressed that they believe the programmatic offerings from KCC are more aligned with their County needs, and that they are satisfied with the services provided by KCC. During the same hearings process, COCC expressed no current plans to increase their level of services to the residents of N Lake County.

In addition to the prospect of improved services, the residents of N Lake County will experience a reduction of their mill rate, as KCC's taxing district rate is lower than that of COCC.

HECC supports access to higher education services for all portions of the state, and it recognizes that from time to time, the needs of certain parts of the state change, and capabilities and relationships evolve. The bill before you, which asks you to affirm the order issued by the Commission in December, recognizes this change and maintains access to in-district community college services to residents of N. Lake County. I hope you will support it.

Finally, we have requested an amendment to this bill. Because the Department of Revenue and the drafting of the bill itself consider this to be a transfer of territory from one district to another, this triggers an arcane provision of law that requires HECC to, for the remainder of the biennium, allocate funding to the two affected districts on the basis of their total population. We do not possess knowledge of community college funding practices in the 1970s (when this law was drafted), however, such a provision, if triggered today, would be incredibly disruptive under a structure where institutions are paid on an FTE student basis. We hope the Committee will adopt the language we have submitted to avoid triggering this outdated provision.

Thank you for your time today.