



February 4, 2020

Senate Education Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Senate Bill 1544 – Opposition

Chair Wagner and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your time this afternoon. I am Kim Ierien, Campus President for Concorde Career College, located in Northeast Portland.

On behalf of Concorde, I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 1544. While we sympathize with the abhorrent practices of preying on any student without delivering a quality education and the opportunity for a job, our campus has a stellar record of training high-quality health professionals, and partnering with them long-after graduation to ensure their success. We are also a key component of Oregon's health care workforce, training professionals in fields with constantly growing demand.

We train a diverse group of students, offering them the ability to start their first exposure to post-secondary education or to change career paths. Over 14% of our current population is Hispanic/Latino. In the last 5 years we have had 2,162 students graduate with over 1,656 of them working in their chosen field. This is a placement rate of 76.6%.

Our campus offers seven different degree or diploma programs, including Dental Assistant, Medical Assistant, Medical Office Administration, Polysomnographic (sleep) Technology, Practical Nursing, Respiratory Therapy and Surgical Technology. We offer an Associate of Applied Science Degree in both Respiratory Therapy and Surgical Technology – capital intensive, hands-on programs that are not widely offered in the region. We purposely keep our class sizes small so that our graduates are not competing with recent grads for job placement.

In addition, we go beyond simply training our students. Our Student Affairs department focuses on maintaining and enhancing a positive learning environment for all students. This is accomplished through proactive interaction and relationship building between the student body and the Student Affairs Department. The Graduate Employment department assists students in their career search throughout and upon successful completion of studies by offering information on career opportunities, résumé preparation and guidance in interviewing techniques. We have strong partnerships with Providence, OHSU, Kaiser, Pacific Dental Services, Legacy Health and a wide variety of medical providers across the region and the state. We work with countless dental practices to place our grads in dental assistant positions in the region.



While we only have a small population of veterans, unfortunately SB 1544 is so much broader than simply protecting veterans and their GI benefits. SB 1544 would unfairly distinguish student populations between those who are reliant on public student aid, and those who can afford to self-finance their education. As you can imagine, most of our students are reliant on public student aid. Our campus is only 308 students. Adding a 90-10 revenue requirement potentially creates significant access barriers for both our veteran and non-veteran students alike. More generally, it unfairly brands all private career colleges as poor stewards of financial-aid and creates artificial thresholds for our school that are unrelated to our educational and occupational outcomes.

SB 1544 could pose a serious threat to our existence, and therefore the availability of surgical techs, respiratory techs, dental assistants, and other professionals that are critical to Oregon's medical and dental providers. With more pressure on an already limited workforce, from our perspective SB 1544 would present additional access and affordability issues for Oregonians health-care system. More specifically, SB 1544 unnecessarily includes "institutional loans" in the 90-10 threshold, thereby further jeopardizing our campus and access for our students. Both the threshold and the definitions are artificial barriers to access without a legitimate policy justification. Certainly, there are better ways to address predatory practices by bad actors in the post-secondary education market.

This bill limits student access to all, legitimate private career colleges, as response to a narrow problem of predatory practices by very few organizations, some of which are no longer in Oregon. On behalf of Concorde, we are committed to working with the legislature, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission and this Committee to address the problems raised by VES. But we urge you to find appropriate solutions that maintain access for our students.

Again, we oppose SB 1544 as written, and look forward to continued conversations to ensure Oregon's post-secondary education system is fair, accessible, and ensures the success of our students.

Sincerely,

Kim Ierien, Campus President

Dennis Kelley, Academic Dean